THE MOTHER GODDESS KĀMĀKHYĀ

BANI KANTA KAKATI

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE MOTHER GODDESS KĀMĀKHYĀ

Or studies in the fusion of Aryan and primitive beliefs of Assam

By

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PREFACE

The old Greek saying that a big book is a big evil has perhaps never had a more extended application than at present. The scarcity of paper and the enormous cost of printing when a press is at all available shew book-making to be an unenviable business. But the modern craving for authorship refuses to be dissipated by the difficulties on the way and calls for satisfaction even by diminutive productions.

The present publication is the outcome of such a craving. In the present political set up of India, Assam is fast shedding her character of a mere geographical expression in the map of India. And yet she has not yet told the story of her growth and development as a meeting ground of the Aryans and the Mongols. Excepting the administrative Gazetteers of the last regime and the classical *History of Assam* (1905) by Sir Edward Gait, cultural publications about Assam have been dismally poor. The late Mr. K. L. Barua's *Early History of Kāmarūpa* (1933), Dr. B. K. Barua's *Assamese Literature* (1941, P.E.N. Books), and the present author's *Life and Teachings of Śankara Deva*, 1923 formerly published in the Saints of India Series (Natesan & Co., Madras) but now incorporated in Natesan's fresh publication *Chaitanya to Vivekananda*, 1928 are all the sketches that give in outline the purely Aryan aspect of Assamese thoughts and activities.

The present publication is a mere introduction towards the study of the fusion of the Aryan and extra-Aryan religious beliefs and practices in Assam in the

light of the comparative method of modern sociological studies. The beliefs and practices have been tracked as far as possible to their sources. No conclusion has been hazarded because none is possible at this stage. An attempt has only been made to enlarge the scope of discussion.

The materials have been mainly collected from the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and the *Yoginī Tantra* (both composed in or near about ancient Assam) and the Copper-plate Land-grants of early Hindu kings (now available in a book form).

The notices of early Assamese beliefs and customs lie scattered and embedded in different mythological settings or preceptorial injunctions in these books. They have been disentangled and fitted up once again in probable historical settings. To give the varied materials something like a coherence for the first time, the figure of Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā has been chosen as the pivot round which they have been made to revolve (§ 29). The materials have thus been presented from a single point of view, viz. that of institutional cultus. Outside the official cults the vast mass of materials comprising magic, witchcraft and sorcery that constituted the popular religion has been left untouched. Thus no notice has been taken in this book of Śankarācārya's encounter with Abhinavagupta of Kāmarūpa (as told in *Śankara-Digvijaya*), of Guru Nanaka and Guru Tegbahadura's exploits (Macauliffe: *History of Sikh Religion* 1909; vols. I & IV) and of the descriptions of magic and witchcraft by Moghul historians (M. I. Borah: *Lectures on the History of Assam as told by Muslim historians*, 1938). Of vital importance as these materials are as constituting

the milieu, they could not be utilised in a short publication.

The Bombay editions of the *Kālikā Purāna* and the *Yoginī Tantra* have been referred to. The text of the *Yoginī Tantra* is corrupt in many places and often gives no meaning at all. But elucidation has been sought from a finely edited manuscript of the book preserved in the Assam Research Society's library, Gauhati. To avoid repetition these two books have often been referred to as *K. P.* and *Y. T.*

A short introduction of the Copper-plate Land-grants seems called for as they do not appear to be very much known abroad. The late Mahāmahopādhyāya Pandit Padmanātha Bhaṭṭācārya, M.A., (formerly Senior Professor of Sanskrit in the Cotton College, Gauhati) published the Sanskrit copper-plate inscriptions of the early Hindu Kings of Assam in 1838 B.S. (1931 A.D.). The Pandit had compiled, deciphered and worked at the grants over many years and after his retirement from office put them in together under the comprehensive title of *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī* and got them published through the courtesy of the Rangpur Sāhitya Parisad, North Bengal. The Sanskrit text has been printed in the Devanāgarī script and the accompanying Bengali translation in the Bengali script. There is also a long historical introduction in Bengali. Though the Bengali translation takes away much of the usefulness of the publication in other parts of India and abroad, the text may be relied upon as having been very carefully prepared.

The inscriptions have all been composed in Sanskrit, some in verse and others in prose. The Sanskrit has been interspersed with Prakrit and indigenous *deśya*

formations. Contrary to current practices, the editor instead of retaining the Prakrit formations in the text, substituted corresponding reconstructed Sanskrit formations in their places. The original Prakritisms have, however, been preserved in foot-notes under headings like " Original readings ".

There are ten inscriptions ranging from the seventh to the twelfth century A.D., covering practically the entire Hindu period of Assam history. From the thirteenth century onwards, Assam passed into the hands of the Shans. These land grants were ordered by seven Hindu kings in different times measured by centuries. Their names, regnal times and the places wherefrom the grants were issued are given in the following table. The serial numbers of the grants are put in just after the names, in Roman notation.

Names.	*Grant No.*	*Time.*	*Place of issue.*
1. Bhāskara Varmā	(I)	7th century	Karṇasuvarṇa
2. Harjara Varmā	(II)	9th century	Hāruppeśvara
3. Vanamāla Deva	(III)	9th century	Hāruppeśvara
4. Bala Varmā	(IV)	10th century	Hāruppeśvara
5. Ratnapāla	(V, VI)	11th century	Durjayā
6. Indrapāla	(VII, VIII)	11th century	Durjayā
7. Dharmapāla	(IX, X)	12th century	Kāmarūpa (city)

The references to other authorities have been woven into the body of the text and a separate bibliography is not drawn up in the interest of economy of space.

Some of the essays included in the present volume were published in various periodicals (notably the *New Indian Antiquary,* Poona; and *Assam Tribune,* Gauhati) under different headings. The essay on *the Break with the Mother* appeared under a different heading in the

P. V. Kane Commemoration Volume, 1941. They have all been retouched and fitted into the context of the present publication.

My grateful thanks are due to Mr. Punya Prasad Duara, B.L., an ex-pupil and a child of fortune, for voluntarily undertaking to bear the cost of publication of the book.

The indexes have been drawn up by Prof. Praphulladatta Goswami, M.A., an ex-pupil but now an esteemed colleague.

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3 March, 1948. B. KAKATI

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Chapter I

THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

1. The province of Assam and its people are very insufficiently known abroad. Yet by its earlier name of Kāmarūpa, it is better known to Hindu India as a land of magic and witchcraft with its famous Tantric shrine of Kāmākhyā with which it is frequently associated together (Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhyā).

The province was differently called in different historical periods. Its most ancient name was Prāg-jyotiṣapura. By this name it is referred to in the two great epics—the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* and the principal *Purāṇas*. In classical Sanskrit literature both Prāg-jyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa occur as alternative names of the country. Kālidāsa refers to it by both the designations (*Raghu* : Canto IV. 83). In epigraphic records the name Kāmarūpa was first mentioned in the Allahabad inscriptions of Samudra Gupta in the fifth century. (FLEET : *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* : vol. ii, p. 8).

The modern designation Assam was connected with the Shan invaders of the Brahmaputra valley. Since 1228 the easternmost portion of the valley came under the domination of a section of the great Thai (Tai) or Shan race which spread eastwards from the border of Assam over nearly the whole of further India and far into the interior of China. It seems curious that while the Shan invaders called themselves Tai, they came to

be referred to as Āsām, Āsam, Asam, Ācām in contemporary Assamese literature. In modern Assamese they are referred to as Āhom, which is a modern phonetic development of earlier Āsam.

No satisfactory explanation has been offered by historians about the origin of the term *Āsām* as applied to the Shans. It seems likely that *Āsām* is connected with Tai $\sqrt{Ch\bar{a}m}$, "to be defeated", with the Aryan Assamese privative prefix *ā*—, the whole formation *Āsām* meaning "undefeated" 'victorious', thus being a hybrid equivalent of the word *Thai, (Tai)*, meaning "free".

2. The boundary limits of modern Assam are well known. But the earlier territories denoted by Prāg-jyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa were wider and extended over a considerable portion of north Bengal. The boundaries of ancient Kāmarūpa have been clearly demarcated by the *Yoginī Tantra*, but the extent of the territories that was anciently covered by the term Prāg-jyotiṣa has to be made out with the help of conflicting references in the epics and the *Purāṇas*. The following observations have been quoted verbatim from F. E. Pargiter in his English translation of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 1904: pp. 328, 329. "Prāg-jyotisha was a famous kingdom in early times and is often mentioned in the MBh. The references to it, however, are rather perplexing, for in some passages it is called a Mlecha Kingdom ruled over by king Bhagadatta, who is always spoken of in respectful and even eulogistic terms (*Sabhā*: *Udyoga*; and *Karṇa*) and in other passages it is called a Dānava or Asura kingdom ruled over by the demons Naraka and Muru (*Vana*; *Udyoga*; *Hari V*; *Rāmāyaṇa*), while in some other passages the allusions seem mixed, e.g. *Sabhā* seems to call Bhagadatta a Yavana. The second class of passages

occur, I believe, only in descriptions of Krishna's exploits; they are spoilt by hyperbolical laudation and are probably later than the first class. Prāg-jyotisha was placed in the North region (*Sabhā; Vana*) but was also considered to be in the East as in the text here. North of it seemingly lay tracts called Antargiri, Vahirgiri and Upagiri (*Sabhā*) which appear to be the lower slopes of the Himalayas and the Terai; and it was close to the mountains, for Bhagadatta is called Śailālaya (*Strī*). It bordered on the Kirātas and Cīnas for they formed his retinue (*Sabhā, Udyoga*). He also drew his troops from among the people who dwelt in the marshy regions near the sea, Sāgarānūpa (*Sabhā, Karṇa*) and it is even said he dwelt at the Eastern Ocean (*Udyoga*); these marshy regions can only be the alluvial tracts and islands near the mouths of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra as they existed anciently. These data indicate that Prāg-jyotisha comprised the whole of North Bengal proper. The *Raghu Vaṁśa* places it seemingly beyond the Brahmaputra (III. 81), but Kālidāsa was a little uncertain in distant geography. Its capital was called Prāg-jyotisha also. Although the people were Mlecchas, the Rāmāyaṇa ascribes the founding of this kingdom to Amurtarajas one of the four sons of a great king Kuśa (*Ādi*). Amurtarayas, as the name is generally written in the Mahābhārata, is mentioned there simply as father of the famous king Gaya (*Vana*: *Droṇa*)." But the *Kālikā Purāṇa* makes Naraka the founder of the worship of Kāmākhyā whose temple is situated beyond the Brahmaputra, and as the Kāmākhyā hill was within Naraka's Prag-jyotiṣa, it may be assumed that in times later than the composition of the Mahābhārata, the boundary of

Prāg-jyotiṣa was extended to include also the tracts on the other side of the Brahmaputra.

3. An attempt should be made to find out the meaning of the term *Prāg-jyotiṣa*. It is indifferently used to designate the kingdom as well as its king, Bhagadatta. In the *Udyoga* (48/80) Prāg-jyotiṣa is the name of an inaccessible city, *Prāg-jyotiṣam—durgam puram*. In the *Droṇa* (25/35,) king Bhagadatta is meant by Prāg-jyotiṣa; *tato rājā Daśārṇānām Prāg-jyotiṣamupādravat*, then the king of the Dāśārṇas rushed towards *Prāg-jyotiṣa*, i.e. Bhagadatta. In the *Droṇa* (25/37, 42) Bhagadatta is referred to as *Prāg-jyotiṣapatiḥ*, and *Prāg-jyotiṣa-rājā*.

In other places Bhagadatta is referred to as *Śailālaya-, Parvatapati-;* e.g. *eṣaḥ Śailālayo rājā Bhagadattaḥ pratāpavān* (*Strī* 23/10), this powerful king Bhagadatta, dweller in the hills. So also, *tathā śailālayo rājā Bhagadatta-pitāmahaḥ* (*Āśrama* 25/10). In the *Droṇa* (25/52), *Parvatapatiḥ*=Bhagadatta; *suparvā parvatapatirninye Vaivasvatakṣayam*, the stalwart lord of the hills (i.e. Bhagadatta) was sent to the abode of Vaivasvata.

Thus according to his place of origin or residence Bhagadatta is variously designated as Prāg-jyotiṣa, Prāg-jyotiṣapati-, Śailālaya-, Parvatapati-. In the *Udyoga* (4/11) Bhagadatta is called *Pūrvasāgaravāsī*, dweller in the eastern sea.

The *Kālikā Purāṇa* suggests a mythological derivation of the formation Prāg-jyotiṣa (39/126) :—"Formerly Brahmā staying here created the star, so the city is called Prāg-jyotiṣapura." But in Sorensen's *Index to Proper names in the Mahābhārata*, no association of the name with astrology or astronomy is suggested. The

etymology is left unexplained like those of other proper names.

4. The etymological lead given by the *Kālikā Purāṇa* has been followed up by the historians of Assam. Sir E. A. Gait writes: "*Prāg* means former or eastern, and *jyotiṣa*, a star, astrology, shining. *Prāg-jyotiṣapura* may therefore be taken to mean the city of Eastern Astrology. The name is interesting in connection with the reputation which the country has always held as a land of magic and incantation, and with the view that it was in Assam that the Tantrik form of Hinduism originated." (*History of Assam*, p. 15). Rai Bahadur K. L. Barua accepts the etymology but reads in it a different connotation. "It is significant that to the immediate east of the town of Gauhati there is a temple on the crest of a hill known as Citrācala, and this temple is dedicated to the Navagrahas or the nine planets. It is probable that this temple is the origin of the name Prāg-jyotiṣapura (*Early History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 13).

The *Citraśaila* or *Arvāk hill* (*Kālikā Purāṇa*: 82/120) where the *navagrahas* or nine planets are worshipped is one of the many sacred places mentioned in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*. The place is not given any prominence in the *Puraṇa* or in local tradition to lend a name to a whole kingdom. There is a *navagraha* temple also in the state of Baud in Southern India, (*The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Bengal* Vol. ii. p. 453). The association of Assam to magic and incantation seems to be covered by the term Kāmarūpa and not Prāg-jyotiṣa.

From the varied toponymical epithets of Bhagadatta, Prāg-jyotiṣa seems to be connected with topographical features of the land rather than with any religious cult. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10/59/2·3), makes pointed

mention of the topographical peculiarities of the locality, *Prāg-jyotiṣapuram yayau/giridurgaiḥ, śastradurgairjalāgnyaniladurgamaṁ,* (Kṛṣṇa mounted on Garuḍa) went to Prāg-jyotiṣapura, inaccessible by reason of hill fortifications, arms fortifications, waters, fires and winds.

5. Subject to usual reservations about the accuracy of etymology based merely on sound and sense, the component elements of the word *Prāg-jyotiṣa* may be equated to the following Austric formations ; *pau,* hill, H93 ; *ger, gerbu, garbu,* hill, H87 (b) ; *ma-juh, men-jo,* high, tall, F29 ; *be-ti, be-tig,* long, L130 (a) ; *tic'* (Santali), to stretch, elongate ; also *pagār* (Mundari), an elevated ridge with a drain on one side ; *pagar* (Santali), a water channel.

The topographical features of Prāg-jyotiṣa as described in the *Purāṇas* would correspond to a formation like **Pagar-juh (jo)-tic' (c'=ch)* = (a region of) extensive high hills. Thus *Prāg-jyotiṣa* may be a Sanskritisation of a non-Aryan formation.

It has been said in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* that immediately after Naraka of Mithilā became king and was placed in charge of the goddess Kāmākhyā, the name of the land was changed from Prāg-jyotiṣa to Kāmarūpa. The term *Kāmarūpa/Kāmākhyā* symbolised a new cult, and in exaltation of it, the land itself was re-christened. It has also been said in the same *Pūrāṇa* that the land Prāg-jyotīṣa was formerly reserved by Śambhu for his own domain ; thus suggesting that before the introduction of the novel cult of Kāmākhyā, with associations of magic and incantation, the religion of the land was Śaivism.

Thus Prāg-jyotiṣa has nothing to do with the worship of any god or goddess or the planets. It is a toponymical

term distinct in connotation from Kāmarūpa which has a religious association.

The probable etymology of Kāmarūpa (mediaeval Assam) and its association with magic has been indicated below (§. 34). In addition to what has been said there about the connection of Kāmarūpa with *Kambru, Kamru,* the name of a divinity, it may be noted that the term *Kāmarū* as an alternative form of *Kāmarūpa* is attested in an old historical document written in Sanskrit and called *Haragaurī-Samvāda* and published in extracts in the *Indian Historical Quarterly* Vol. XVIII. No. 3, *pālayiṣyati Kāmarūm ; vāsayiṣyati Kāmarūm ; Kāmarūpam dharmataḥ pālayiṣyati.* Thus Kāmarūpa=the hill of *Kamru,* a goddess.

6. The boundary of Kāmarūpa is marked by the river Karatoyā in the west and the Lalita-Kāntā in the east. This region is said to have been under the spiritual domination of Kāmākhyā (*K.P.* 39/122). East of it lay the tract called Saumāra. The *Yoginī Tantra* includes Saumāra also within the boundary of Kāmarūpa (1/11/18). According to it, Kāmarūpa included the tract lying between the Karatoyā river on the west and the Dikrang on the east, the mountains of Kāñcana and Girikanyakā on the north and the confluences of the Brahmaputra and Lakshmi rivers on the south ; that is to say, it included roughly the Brahmaputra valley, the Bhutan, Rangpur and Koch Bihar (Gait : p. 10).

While the *Kālikā Purāṇa* speaks of four great *Pīṭhas* of India (viz. Oḍra ; Jālaśaila ; Pūrṇa-pīṭha and Kāmarūpa), the *Yoginī Tantra* refers to nine great *Pīṭhas* (viz. Bhadra Pīṭha ; Jālandhara ; Pūrṇapīṭha, Kāmarūpa, Kolvapura ; Bihāra ; Mahendra ; Śrīhaṭṭa ; Oḍra). The *K.P.* considers the whole of Kāmarūpa to be one Pīṭha

but the *Yoginī Tantra* splits it up into *nine* Pīṭhas, viz. (1) Punyākhya; (2) Madhya Pīṭha; (3) Nīla Pīṭha, (4) Saumāra, (5) Hayatāmra, (6) Śivatalpa, (7) Varāhī, (8) Kolapīṭha, (9) Śripīṭha. The geographical boundaries of these divisions are not clear except in the cases of Punyākhya, Nīlapīṭha and Saumāra (2/1). In another context it refers to another *Pīṭha* called Ratnapīṭha. In the *Raghu Vaṁśa*, Kālidāsa refers to another *Pīṭha* named Hemapīṭha.

A later Sanskrit work called *Haragaurī Samvāda* divides Kāmarūpa into *four* Pīṭhas with clearly marked river boundaries viz., (1) Ratnapīṭha between the Karatoyā and the Svarṇakoṣa; (2) Kāmapīṭha between the Svarṇakoṣa and the Kapilī; (3) Svarṇapīṭha between the Puṣpikā and the Bhairavī; (4) Saumāra between the Bhairavī and the Dikrang. This division into *four* Pīṭhas is regarded as classical in later documents but it is also enumerated in different orders as Kāmapīṭha, Ratnapīṭha, Bhadrapīṭha and Saumāra. The Svarṇapīṭha of the previous category of *four* may be the Hemapīṭha of Kālidāsa. For signification of *Yoginī Tantra's* division into *nine* see (§§ 46, 48).

7. The *K. P.* broadly describes the original inhabitants of Kāmarūpa as Kirātas with shaven heads and yellow skins (§ 12). As Assam's inhabitants are composed of diverse tribes and races, the word Kirāta requires examination and in this connection Pargiter's observations are quoted *in extenso*.

"The word Kirāta is no doubt the same as the modern names Kirati and Kiranti, which mean 'a native of Kirant-des or mountainous country lying between the Dud-Kosi and the Karki rivers in Nepal. The term includes the Khambu, Limbu and Yakha tribes; and the

Danuar, Hayu and Thami also claim to be Kiranti, but their claim is disputed by the first three tribes which are superior." (Risley's *Castes and Tribes of Bengal*, 1.490). But formerly they had a much larger range and were spread along the greater part of the southern side of the Himalayas, for Arjuna encountered them in his northern expedition (*Sabhā-P*), Bhima in his eastern (*ibid*), and Nakula in his western expedition (*ibid*). They formed a group of closely allied yet distinct tribes or clans, for two separate Kirāta kings are named (*Sabhā-P*), seven kings are alluded to (*ibid*), "all the Kirātas" are spoken of (*Vana-P*) and they are mentioned thrice in the (*Bhīṣma-P*) list. Their chief territory was among the mountains Kailāsa, Mandara, and Haima (*Anuśās-P*), that is, the region around Lake Manasa. They were allied to the Tanganas and Pulindas for the three people inhabited one large kingdom ruled by Subāhu, who was king of the Pulindas (*Vana-P*), and is also styled a Kirāta (*ibid*). The tribes differed much in material condition, for some were civilised and open to friendly intercourse (*Vana-P* and *Udyoga-P*) and others were clad in skins, lived on fruit and roots and were cruel (*Sabhā-P*). Their women were used as slaves (*ibid*). The *Rāmāyaṇa* describes them as wearing thick top-knots (*Kishk-K*). Manu's remarks that the Kirātas were Kshattriyas and became degraded because of the extinction of sacred rites, &c. (43 and 44) reflects the opinions of a later age." (pp. 322, 323 f.n.).

According to the *Kūrma Purāṇa*, all the non-Aryan tribes of eastern India were referred to under a group denomination as Kirātas as those of western India as Yavanas (*Kūrma*: 1/46/26). In later times the meaning of the term Kirāta expanded so as to signify any hill

tribe. In a work called *Śaktisangama Tantra,* the Kirāta country is described as being situated in the Vindhyas :— *Kirātadeśo deveśi Vindhya śaile ca tiṣṭhati* (D. C. Sircar : *Indian Culture* : Vol. III, No. I, 1941 : *An account of the fifty-six countries lying on the borders of India*). In the present context the word appears to denote all the races with the Burmese type of features along the eastern limits of India (Pargiter ; p. 284 f.n.).

8. The *Yoginī Tantra* frankly confesses that the religion of the *Yogini Pīṭha* is of Kirāta origin : *Siddheśi yoginī pīṭhe dharmaḥ kairātajaḥ mataḥ* (2/9/13). Since *dharma* is a wide term including both rites and ceremonies and the worship of particular gods, it is not clear whether this *dharma* refers to particular deities or local rites and ceremonies. But the way in which the author of the *Yoginī Tantra* affiliates Tārā and Kāmākhyā to Kālī (§§ 32) raises the suspicion that he considered them to be of strange origin. That this *dharma* also included local rites and ceremonies is clear from his injunctions to follow regional practices (§ 60).

Chapter II

ŚIVA WORSHIP

9. Both in legends and history Śiva-worship appears to have been the most popular form of religion in early Assam both amongst the aboriginal and the Aryanised people. Śiva temples have always outnumbered the temples associated with other individual gods and goddesses. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* in recounting the sacred places of ancient Kāmarūpa mentions fifteen places sacred to Śiva against five sacred to the Devī and five sacred to Viṣṇu (Chapters 81, 82). Even in modern Assam Śaivite temples outnumber those sacred to other gods and goddesses.

From historical records it appears that all the principal royal dynasties of early Assam were in some way associated in devotion with Śiva. The collection of copper-plate land grants published under the title of *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī* contains ten plates of seven Hindu kings ranging from the seventh to the twelfth century. The opening verse containing the words of obeisance in one plate (of Harjara Varmā of the ninth century) has frayed out ; in another plate (second grant of Dharma Pāla of the twelfth century), obeisance has been offered to Viṣṇu in his Boar incarnation. In the remaining eight grants Śiva receives the opening salutation. In the first grant of Indrapāla (of the eleventh century), it has been said that Śiva temples were erected on a profuse scale throughout his kingdom by the king.

The royal dynasty of Koch Bihar founded by Biśva Singh early in the sixteenth century traces its descent from Śiva. The Ahom king (of the Shan dynasty), Śiva Siṁha, a convert to Śākta persuasion of Hinduism erected a Śiva temple called Śiva *dol* in 1720 A.D.

10. No mention is made anywhere in the early land grants about Kāmākhyā or the Devī. Only in the grant of Vanamāla Deva (of the ninth century) and in the second grant of Indrapāla (of the eleventh century) casual reference is made to Kāmeśvara-Mahāgaurī and Mahāgaurī-Kāmeśvara respectively. In the same grant of Indrapāla, one of his thirty-two epithets is said to have been *Hara-girijā-caraṇa-pankaja-rajo-ranjitottamāngaḥ*, one whose head is adorned with the dust of the lotus feet of Hara and Girijā.

Śiva does not cease making his existence felt even upon the lives of the Vaiṣṇavite reformers of the 16th century. It is said that Śankara Deva, (§ 67) the founder of Assam Vaiṣṇavism was so named because his father secured the birth of a son in him by propitiation of Śiva (Śankara). Mādhava Deva; the closest follower and associate of Śankara Deva, once received an order from his elder brother to worship Śiva on the occasion of the *caturdaśī* festival. Vanamālī Deva, a missionary of Vaiṣṇavism in eastern Assam and founder of the Dakṣiṇapāṭa Satra had once by a combination of miraculous circumstances to encounter a Śiva image (§ 68). It thus appears that Śiva has exercised a considerable influence on Assam's religion in different historical periods. In the pre-historic legendary periods also Śiva seems to have been a popular god amongst the aboriginal people. But his recognition seems at first to have been surreptitious and his supremacy to have been often contended. Below

are examined certain legends throwing light on the early history of Śaivism.

11. Rai Bahadur Guṇābhirāma Baruā in his history of Assam (*Assam Buranji*, 1900) states that Śiva-worship was first introduced in early Assam by Jalpeśvara, a king of the tract of land in North Bengal known as Jalpāiguri, and formerly included in the ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa. The same king is said also to have founded the temple called Jalpeśvara. Nothing further is known about this king from history. But in the *Skanda Purāṇa* (*Āvantya Khaṇḍa* Chapter 66), there is a story as to how this king came to be a Śiva worshipper. The story is as follows:

There was once a famous king called Jalpa. He had five sons named Subāhu, Śatrumardī, Jaya, Vijaya and Vikrānta. They were all skilled in arms and scriptural lore. The king divided his kingdom among his five sons and retired to a life in the forest.

The minister of the youngest king Vikrānta invited his master to compass the death of his four brothers by magic rites of the *Atharva Veda*. The baleful rites were initiated. The other four on hearing about it felt alarmed and began counter-rites. When the conflicting rites attained due potency, their action and counter-action enveloped in ruins all the five kings, the priests and the attendants. King Jalpa in the forest heard about this and was overwhelmed in sorrow. Had he not been born such a calamity would not have taken place! He sought consolation from sage Vaśiṣṭha and got directions for necessary penance. He was to proceed to Mahākāla forest where Paraśurāma was undergoing penances after having extirpated all the Kṣatriyas. He was to worship an Anādi Linga there, located west of Kukkuṭeśvara. The

king followed the directions and worshipped the Linga according to prescribed rites. After some time came an aerial voice from within the image. The voice threw the whole blame for the tragedy of the king's sons on fate. Getting thus exculpated the king solicited a boon for undying fame. The boon was granted and while all the gods and men were looking on the king got merged in the Anādi Linga. Since then the Linga came to be known as *Jalpeśvara.*

12. From the story it appears that Śiva-worship was then not much in vogue. The king's retirement to the forest and his sons' practice of Atharvan rites shew that they were adherents of Vedic religion. Śiva worship was not perhaps recognised in high places and might have been followed only by the lower ranks. Some countenance is given to this assumption by a certain statement in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* (80/55, 56). It is said that "some Kṣatriyas disguised themselves as mlecchas for fear of Paraśurāma and surrendered themselves to Jalpīśa-Śiva for protection. Though Aryan-speakers, they constantly spoke in the *mleccha* tongue (evidently to keep up their disguise). They worshipped *Jalpīśa-Śiva* and kept him concealed." No explanation has been given as to why the Jalpīśa image was kept in concealment. Was Śiva-worship tabooed ? Or was the image made inaccessible so that the disguised Kṣatriyas might avoid contact with all and sundry ? Collateral references in the *K. P.* raise the suspicion that Siva-worship was under a shade (§ 15).

The *K. P.* tells the story of a certain Naraka (different from the Naraka of the epics) of Mithilā leading a colonising expedition into the ancient Prāg-jyotiṣa kingdom. Referring to its previous history the *Purāṇa* says that that kingdom (Prāg-jyotiṣa) was formerly

preserved by Śambhu for his own domain :— *sa ca deśaḥ svarājyārthe pūrvam guptaśca Śambhunā* (39/103-4). The aboriginal inhabitants were Kirātas with shaven heads and addicted to drink and flesh. Naraka was accompanied in his expedition by a Vaiṣṇavite religious guide (described as Viṣṇu his putative father). Naraka settled twice-born people within his kingdom and he was enjoined by his Vaiṣṇavite guide not to worship any other deity except Kāmākhyā, a *Yoni* goddess. He could not transfer his devotion to any other god or goddess except on the penalty of death. Śiva is evidently ignored by being classed with other gods.

It would appear that the aboriginal Kirātas were under the protection of Śiva ; because it has been said that they were expelled to the eastern sea with the consent of Śambhu :—*Śambhoranumate tadā* (39/28). Divested of symbolism this may mean that the Kirātas under their Śaivite leader voluntarily withdrew towards the eastern sea.

Thus though Śaivism stood banned, it seems to have been driven underground. Naraka confesses in one place that Śiva remains hidden within his city (44/65). There seems to have been a conspiracy afoot amongst the Śaivites to overthrow the new worship and win Naraka over from following the injunctions of the Vaiṣṇavite teacher.

13. In a neighbouring kingdom called Śoṇitapura there was a Śaivite king named Bāṇa. Bāṇa after having propitiated Śiva developed *āsuric* manners and roamed about free from fears from any quarter. He struck up friendship with Naraka and Naraka learnt to appreciate his ways and manners. Naraka began to neglect the Brāhmaṇas, lost faith in gifts and sacrifices and developed

indifference to the goddess Kāmākhyā. At such a juncture a certain ascetic named Vaśiṣṭha came to visit the goddess. Naraka roughly refused entry to the ascetic and drove him out without any ceremony. The ascetic grew wroth and cursed Naraka. He would shortly be killed by his father Viṣṇu in human form. The goddess Kāmākhyā would remain hidden during the short remaining period of his life. And he, Vaśiṣṭha, would visit Kāmākhyā only after Naraka's death. After pronouncing this curse Vaśiṣṭha in deep dudgeon left for his own hermitage in the Sandhyācala and there remained wrapped in contemplation of Śiva (53/90).

After Vaśiṣṭha had left, Naraka hastened towards the Kāmākhyā temple and found the goddess missing with all the paraphernalia of her worship!

Was the whole affair got up and stage manoeuvred by the Śaivites?

14. Frightened by shadows of the impending calamity, Naraka sent for Bāṇa for friendly guidance. Bāṇa came and reviewed the situation. Bāṇa's study only increased the hostility of Naraka towards Viṣṇu and other Vedic gods like Indra. Bāṇa said that Indra was a jealous god and did not tolerate the prosperity and well-being of any one,—be he a man, a *rākṣasa*, a *kinnara*, or a *daitya*. By crooked means and with the help of other gods he was sure to encompass his downfall. Viṣṇu was the tutelary god of Indra and Viṣṇu would not suffer anybody to do harm to Indra. Whoever worshipped Viṣṇu for a boon potent against Indra, would be granted one coupled with fatal defects. Though Viṣṇu was his protector, he had no natural compassion for anybody. He was propitiated by his (Naraka's) mother and so he granted a conditional boon that all would be

well with Naraka unless and until he offended the twice-born. Vaśiṣṭha should not be found fault with. So Naraka should try to propitiate Brahmā or Śiva. Naraka was won over by the arguments of Bāṇa and chose to worship Brahmā in preference to Śiva "because he was lying concealed in his own kingdom,—*antarguptaṁ sa me pure* (44/65).

Naraka propitiated Brahmā and got his desired boons. He fortified his kingdom and according to the instructions of Bāṇa redoubled his persecutions of god Indra and the twice-born people. He let loose a campaign of demoniac fury in the world (41/13). Of yore he was religious minded, devoted to penances and worship of the gods. Now, possessed by demoniac ideas (*āsuraṁ bhāvamāsādya*) he harassed all (41/52). At last he was killed by Viṣṇu in the person of Kṛṣṇa. In the battle he found to his surprise goddess Kāmākhyā in the form of Kālī fighting by the side of Kṛṣṇa with red eyes and long drawn swords!

15. To review the position, Śaivism in some gross form associated with wine and flesh was the prevailing religion of the aboriginal Kirātas. The Aryanised conquerors held this religion in disdain and placed it under a ban. At the same time to secure easy recognition by aboriginal people they brought to prominence another local cult,—the cult of the Mother Goddess worshipped in the *Yoni* symbol as opposed to the cult of Śiva worshipped in the phallic symbol. This mother cult of Kāmākhyā must have belonged to certain matriarchal tribes like the Khāsis and the Gāros. To win over their allegiance and support and facilitate the propagation of Aryan ideas and customs, royal patronage was extended to this local cult of Kāmākhyā. The Mother Goddess in Kāmākhyā could

very easily be brought into alignment with other forms of the Mother Goddess like Durgā, Kālī &c. which had already been recognised and adored in the *Mahābhārata* and the earlier *Purāṇas*. The Śaivites scented danger in this suppression of their own cult and the exaltation of a rival cult. They secretly hatched a conspiracy not simply against the rival cult, but against the prime instigators, the Vaiṣṇavite teacher and the Aryan twice-born. Naraka was won over from the Aryan ways and the symbol of the goddess Kāmākhyā stolen. Naraka was then destroyed by his former supporters. Anarchy followed.

Naraka seems to have been born and brought up in Śākta surroundings. He was born of Mother Earth (Viṣṇu being his putative father) and brought up by her in the form of a nurse named Kātyāyanī. His wife's name was Māyā (suggestive of Mahāmāyā, another name of the Devī). Naraka himself is said to have been so named because immediately after his birth, he placed his head on the skull (*ka*) of a man (*nara*), the human skull being associated with the cremation ground. His illegitimate birth seems to point to matriarchal traditions.

Durgā with her varied names had already established herself as a mighty goddess in the Pauranic pantheon. In the *Harivaṁśa* she is also called *Nārāyaṇapriyā* (beloved of Nārāyaṇa) and *Vāsudevabhagnī* (sister of Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa). These epithets shew her early association with Viṣṇu and the Vaiṣnavite cult. Commenting on this passage of the *Harivaṁśa*, Muir says—"The object of this passage seems to be to take Durgā and her worship (the extensive prevalence of which could not be ignored by the Vaiṣṇavas) under the protection and patronage of Viṣnu" (J. Muir: *Original Sanskrit Texts*; Vol. IV 1863, p. 370). This will explain why the worship of Kāmakhyā

was encouraged and patronised by Viṣṇu. Kāmākhyā fought by his side against Naraka. In the early stages of her evolution, Durgā with her other manifestations had nothing to do with Śiva. Referring to certain passages from the *Mahābhārata*, Muir observes; "It appears as if some contest had at one time existed between the votaries of Mahādeva and those of other deities in regard to adoration of the former. It may perhaps be inferred from the passages cited that the worship of this god as practised by some tribes was regarded by others with aversion or even with horror. Some further indication of this aversion may be discovered in the myth of Daxa's sacrifice as related in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Vāyu* and other *Purāṇas* (*Original Skt. Texts*. Vol. IV. pp. 160, 311-312). The citations referred to relate to Śiva's acceptance of human sacrifice, his sexual levity and the supremacy of Śiva and Viṣṇu in rival passages. (§§ 19, 58).

THE SECOND PHASE OF ŚIVA WORSHIP

Great Popularity and Corruptions

16. What followed immediately after Naraka's death and the disappearance of the symbol of goddess Kāmākhyā is not mentioned in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*; but the *Yoginī Tantra* which takes a very lenient view of Naraka's conduct towards Vaśiṣṭha states that goddess Kāmākhyā was to suffer eclipse for three hundred years of the Kali era. There will be great sufferings of the people and none but a succession of tribal kings, the Yavanas, the Kuvācas, the Saumāras and the Plavas will rule the country.

Meanwhile Śaivism mixed with varied forms of Tantric rituals attained great popularity in ancient Assam. This popularity has been noticed symbolically in the

Kālikā Purāṇa (Chapter, 84). Kāmarūpa became such a sacred place that all people living there became entitled by virtue of their residence to go to heaven after death. They became completely free from the control of Yama after death. Yama felt greatly chagrined at this loss of control and lodged a complaint with Brahmā. Brahmā took him to Viṣṇu and spoke about the curtailment of Yama's powers. Viṣṇu took them both to Śiva and told him about the sorry state of affairs in Kāmarūpa.

17. Śiva promised to do the needful and mounting his bull went to Kāmarūpa followed by his hosts (*gaṇas*). He ordered the hosts and goddess Ugratārā to drive out all the people. Goddesses Ugratārā and Aparājitā expelled the twice-born and the people of the four orders. Saint Vaśiṣṭha was at that time doing penances to Śiva on the Sandhyācala hill. As Ugratārā and the hosts laid hands on him also for expulsion, the ascetic pronounced a terrible curse on Ugratārā, the hosts and Śiva himself. "O you woman," said he "since you being a woman (*vāmā*) are expelling me also, you will henceforth be worshipped according to *vāmācāra* (left-handed) rites. Your hosts roving about like Mlecchas will henceforth be degraded to the rank of Mlecchas. Since Śiva himself is anxious to see me off, he will henceforth receive only the worship of the Mlecchas, being always covered over with ashes, and carrying bones. This land of Kāmarūpa will be ruled over by Mlecchas and till the advent of Viṣṇu all the Śaivite scriptures (*āgamas*) will be rarities." The curse of the saint had immediate effect and Kāmarūpa became shorn of the Vedic rites, the four orders of men being absent.

Brahmā tried to devise means to put into permanent effect the saint's curse. He contrived such a means that

even after release from the saint's curse, the Śaivite temples remained uninhabitable. He caused the descent of the river Brahmaputra (born of Amoghā, Śāntanu's wife through himself) by strokes of Paraśurāma's axe. The Brahmaputra spread out in deluge over entire Kāmarūpa and washing off all the sacred places flowed towards the sea. Thenceforth it became impossible to recognise the individual *tīrthas*. If any one desired to earn merits of a particular *tīrtha*, he had to take a plunge in the Brahmaputra with the thought of that *tīrtha* in mind.

18. This story refers symbolically to the great popularity the Śaivite cult enjoyed mixed with the saturnalia of the *vāmācāra* rites. Both the aboriginal and the Aryanised people practised these rites. Goddesses of Tantric Buddhism like Aparājitā and Ugratārā got mixed up with Śaivite rites and veritable orgies took place in Śiva temples. Some sort of interdiction was called for against Aryanised people frequenting the Saivite temples where outrageous rites were performed. Vaśiṣṭha is made use of this time to utter curses on Śiva himself. The descent of the Brahmaputra perhaps refers to some periodic inundation which visits Assam from time to time (§. 52) and which in the present case has been linked up with Brahmā's curse.

ACCOMPANIMENTS TO ŚIVA WORSHIP

19. Śiva could not establish a clean record about diet and sex morals even in the earlier legends of the epics. He accepted human sacrifice (§ 58) and his sexual morals could not recommend themselves to others. In a passage in the *Anuśāsana Parva* it is said that "he (*Śiva*) dallies with the daughters and wives of the *rishis* with erect hair,

obscene appearance (*mahāśepho*) naked, with excited look" (*Original Skt. Texts.* Vol. IV. p. 160). In the *Tantras* a Mahābhairava form of Śiva came to be recognised. In this form Śiva gave himself up to unrestrained use of wine, women and flesh. Even Viṣṇu is said to have a Mahābhairava pose in the form of Bālagopāla who indulges himself in wine, women and flesh (*K.P.* 78/204-). In the *K.P.* and the *Y.T.* Śiva appears more often as a Bhairava than as a normal god and therefore *vāmācāra* practices could be legitimately held in the Śiva temples.

20. Temple-women or prostitutes have been referred to in all periods of Assam history as a standing feature of Śiva temples. In the land grant of king Vanamāla Deva (9th century, with capital at Hāruppeśvara or modern Tezpur), there is mention of *daluhānganā* (temple-women). In the same grant it is also stated that the king reconstructed the temple of Hāṭaka-Śiva and restored all its ancient appendages in the form of villages, attendants, elephants and prostitutes,—*grāmebha-veśyājanairyuktam* (*Śāsanāvalī* p. 62). In a chronicle of the Ahom period there is mention of the abduction of dancing girls from the temple of Viśvanātha in Tezpur by a Bengali general of the Moslem army named Satrājit. (*Asam Buranjī* K.A.S. pp. 82-83). It is noteworthy that the principal queen Phuleswari of the Ahom king Śiva Siṁha (1714-1744) was originally a dancing girl in a Śiva temple. She was picked up by the king for her beauty and artistic accomplishments. Corruptions in Śiva temples have been noticed in literature by late R. K. Bardaloi in his famous novel *Rahadai Ligirī*.

About the tribal mode of worship of Śiva there are certain references in the dynastic history of the Koch kings

of Koch Bihar. It is narrated that on the eve of his expedition against the Ahoms, king Naranārāyaṇa of Koch Bihar offered worship to Śiva according to accepted śāstric rites. Thereupon there was an insistence by his *kāchāri* soldiers that Śiva should also be worshipped according to their tribal customs. This was allowed and the worship was carried out by the sacrifice of swine, buffaloes, he-goats, pigeons, ducks and cocks, by the offering of rice and liquor and the dancing of women (*deo-dhāi*). This tribal mode of worship was recognised and legalised by the king by the issue of an edict which set aside the north bank of the Brahmaputra river for the practice of aboriginal forms of worship (Gait: *History of Assam*, 1905, p. 58).

21. A curious practice of animal sacrifice is in vogue even now in the Śiva temples of Assam. On the occasion of the Śiva *caturdaśī* festival, castrated goats are strangled to death in the precincts of the temples. Their flesh is cooked and a huge feast is held at night in the temples. An exception occurs in the Kāmākhyā hill where a castrated goat is decapitated on the same occasion.

Thus the free use of wine, women and flesh scripturally enjoined as accompaniments to varied modes of Śiva worship in an atmosphere of infinite varieties of aboriginal sexual relationship promised an easy deliverance which excited the wrath of Yama and led on to the expulsion from Śaivite temples of the four orders of Aryanised people.

In spite of what might have happened in the past there are innumerable Śiva temples even now in Assam and their number is larger than that of shrines belonging to other individual gods or goddesses. But Śaivism in Assam is an institutional religion made up of rites and ceremonies performed within the precincts of the temples. There

are no Śaivite *gurus*, initiates or sectaries in modern Assam. The once notorious temple-women have now settled down to a caste (the *naṭa*) and lead on household lives, and their place on ceremonial occasions is often taken by their menfolk. Some of them, however, take to prostitution as a profession recognised by the rules of the caste without any obloquy attaching to it.

Chapter III

THE IDENTITY OF NARAKA OF MITHILĀ

22. Reports of isolated events in the life of Naraka lie scattered in the epics and the *Purāṇas*. These reports agree in respect of his being the son of Earth, his demoniac (*āsura*) nature and his subsequent death at the hands of Kṛṣṇa. Other details about his father, his progeny, &c. grow from age to age until the *Kālikā Purāṇa* gathers up all these fragmentary details from different sources and builds a full-length portrait of Naraka with additions of new biographical materials not found anywhere else. Below are grouped together the main incidents in Naraka's life as found in the epics and the *Purāṇas*.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, there are two references to Naraka conflicting with one another in respect of time. In the *Kiṣkindhā* (chapter 42) Naraka is said to dwell in Prāgjyotiṣa, whose hills and caves were to be searched in connection with the abduction of Sītā. This makes Naraka contemporaneous with the events of the *Rāmāyāṇa*. But in the *Yuddha* (69/7), Naraka's death is casually referred to as an event of the past,—*Śambaro deva-rājena, Narako Viṣṇunā yathā/tathādya śayitā Rāmo mayā yudhi nipātitaḥ* :—"like Śambaro by Indra and Naraka by Viṣṇu, Rāma will lie prostrate to-day killed in battle by me". Here Naraka is placed back at a time anterior to the *Rāmāyaṇa* events.

In the Mahābhārata there are references to two distinct persons named Naraka. In the *Vana* (142) there is mention of one Naraka, a *daitya* who performed penances for one thousand years and aspired after the

status of Indra. He was killed through a guile by Kṛṣṇa. About the other and far-famed Naraka, there are scattered references to his various misdeeds in different *parvans*. In the *Udyoga* (48), there is mention of Kṛṣṇa recovering the earrings of Aditi by killing Naraka. In another chapter (130) of the same *parvan*, there is mention of Kṛṣṇa releasing the one thousand girls detained in Naraka's seraglio by killing him. In the *Droṇa* (28), there is an account of Kṛṣna having given a Vaiṣṇavāstra (a Viṣṇu weapon) to Naraka by virtue of his mother Earth's prayers. It is also said that after his death this weapon passed on to Bhagadatta. The relationship of Bhagadatta to Naraka is left undefined.

Detailed accounts of Naraka's daring misdeeds which subsequently brought about his downfall and death occur for the first time in *Harivaṁśa* (63/64). He is known as Bhauma, son of Bhūmi, the Earth. No father is mentioned, and no parental relationship (as found in later literature) is indicated or even remotely hinted at. After his death, his mother returning the ear-rings ejaculates to Kṛṣṇa, " (this my son) given by thee, lies struck down by thee. Do thou sport, (O Lord) as thou likest, like children with toys." This is a devout utterance of mother Earth parallel to the resignation of Job—" The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." But the avowedly sectarian *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (Part V, Chapter 29/23-24) reads a veiled suggestion in " given by thee " and makes Viṣṇu in his Boar incarnation, the progenitor of Naraka. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (59) has simply quoted the verses of the *Viṣṇu* parenthetically.

In classical literature Bāṇa's *Hárṣacarita* (C. 648 A.D.) describes Bhagadatta as being in the *anvaya* (line of succession) of Naraka. The relationship between the two is left vague. In the copper-plate land grants of the early Hindu kings of Kāmarūpa (ranging from the 7th to the 12th century), references are made to Naraka as the son of Viṣṇu and to Bhagadatta as the son of Naraka. Excepting Bhāskara Varmā of the seventh century, all the other kings of the two subsequent dynasties, the Śālastambha and the Pāla, claim Naraka as their remotest ancestor. References are made to Naraka's exploits like the stealing of the ear-rings of Aditi, but no mention is made of him as worshipper of goddess Kāmākhyā or of his relationship with his foster-father Janaka of Mithilā (as related in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*). In the *Kālikā Purāṇa* also Bhagadatta is described as the son of Naraka.

To sum up : in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Naraka is the king of Prāgjyotiṣa and is killed by Viṣṇu. In the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṁśa* he is Bhauma, the son of Bhūmi, the Earth. At his mother's request he is given a Viṣṇu-weapon by Kṛṣṇa which passes on to Bhagadatta after his death. The relationship with Bhagadatta is left undefined. The indefinite relationship is supported also by the *Harṣacarita* of the 7th century, but in the land grant of Bhāskara Varma of the same century who figures also as a prominent character in the *Harṣacarita*, Bhagadatta is referred to as the son of Naraka and Naraka as the son of Earth and Viṣṇu. It is not known from what sources the land grants derive the information about Bhagadatta. But the *Kālikā Purāṇa* supports the accounts of the land grants and brings in fresh biographical details about Naraka which are not found anywhere else. There is no mention of Janaka, Mithilā or Kāmākhyā in the land grants.

THE STORY OF HIS LIFE

23. Within the framework of earlier legends the story of the adventurer from Mithilā has been very skilfully fitted. The story needs a little re-telling in parts to bring out its distinctive features. The author of the *K. P.* has by a curious and clumsy device made Naraka live through the two ages of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

Mother Earth had conceived Naraka through Viṣṇu long before Sītā was born. Her womb was, however, stiffened by Brahmā and other gods so that she might not be delivered of her child and add more confusion to the already confounded world through the misdeeds of Rāvaṇa. The child had to wait in its mother's womb till Rāvaṇa was killed. This makes Naraka contemporaneous with the events of the *Rāmāyaṇā* but then he was in his mother's womb and not the king of Prāg-jyotiṣa. After Rāvaṇa's death Mother Earth discharged the child and deposited it on the sacrificial ground of king Janaka and placed its head on the skull of a dead man. Janaka was informed about the advent of a second child from Mother Earth. He came to the spot and Mother Earth struck a bargain with him. Janaka was to bring up the child in his court along with the royal princes till he was sixteen years old. Mother Earth impersonated herself as a nurse named Kātyāyanī and looked to the child's upbringing. Naraka excelled the royal princes in both the arts of war and peace, and this frightened Janaka. He had misapprehension that this foundling would one day wrest his kingdom from his sons and usurp the throne. One day nurse Kātyāyanī overheard certain confidential discussions between Janaka and his queen Sumati relating to

the future of Naraka. Kātyāyanī scented trouble and determined to remove Naraka from the court at the earliest moment. Kātyāyanī pretended to go out on a pilgrimage to the Ganges and asked Naraka to escort her. Naraka agreed subject to his father Janaka's permission. Kātyāyanī replied that Janaka was not his father. If Naraka only accompanied her to the river bank, he would meet his real father. Janaka was only his foster-father and would not allow him any share in his kingdom.

Both mother and son slipped out of Janaka's court and came to the bank of the Ganges. Naraka learnt the story of his birth and came to recognise his putative father. They came by water to Prāg-jyotiṣa accompanied by Viṣṇu. Naraka conquered the land from the Kirātas and was installed as king by Viṣṇu. He was placed in charge of goddess Kāmākhyā. When subsequently he became prosperous and famous, Janaka with his queen and retinue visited his kingdom and enjoyed his hospitality.

The degradation of Naraka's character by association with Bāṇa has been referred to above (§ 13). He was illegitimate. He might very well be the son of king Janaka himself through a maid-servant named Kātyāyanī. When he got a kingdom and became famous, he was given a divine pedigree according to the Paurāṇic fashion. Janaka nourished some secret affection for him, otherwise he would not have honoured him by visiting his kingdom.

The other incidents of the earlier legend also have been cleverly dovetailed into the present account. According to the *Droṇa* (Chap. 28) Naraka received a Vaiṣṇavāstra (a Viṣṇu weapon) from Kṛṣṇa by virtue of his mother's prayer. In the present account Naraka

receives a Vaiṣṇava-Śakti from Viṣṇu. Now *Śakti* means both a weapon as well as divine energy embodied in a female deity. In the present context it has the dual sense of a missile possessed by Naraka as well as goddess Kāmākhyā as the embodiment of divine energy.

24. The mass of details with which the early life of Naraka has been narrated seems to be too realistic for a mythic account. The legend seems to have been so deeply rooted in popular memory that a certain hillock opposite to the shrine of Kāmākhyā is pointed out as the site of his residence. In the midst of details real or fanciful one very valuable hint has been furnished about the time when he might have flourished. It has been said in the *K. P.* that immediately after he had established himself in power, the name of the kingdom was changed from Prāg-jyotiṣa to Kāmarūpa, *na cirādabhavaddeśaḥ Kāmarūpāhvayastadā* (39/33). If the date of the term Kāmarūpa could be fixed with some amount of certainty that would be the time when Naraka of Mithilā could be said to have reigned. Amongst dated Sanskrit writers Kālidāsa (early fifth century) refers to the kingdom by both the designations Prāg-jyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa (*Raghuvaṁśa*: 4/81, 83). In epigraphic records the term Kāmarūpa was first used in the Allahabad Inscription of Samudra Gupta in the fifth century (Fleet: *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*: Vol. III p. 8). Thus the forward limit of Naraka's time could not be later than the end of the fourth century.

To determine the backward limit, Naraka's missionary role has to be taken into consideration. Naraka may be described as the initiator of the Śākta cult in ancient Assam. He seems to have been brought up in Śākta surroundings at a time when the cult of Śakti as

divine energy meriting adoration was fully established and all female principles in nature were recognised as local or special manifestations of the Devī. So he was made to recognise in Kāmākhyā, a local goddess, a special manifestation of the Devī. This was a new religious principle introduced alongside the prevalent Śaiva worship. Dr. Farquhar approximately assigns A.D. 200-500 as the probable period within which the different Paurāṇic sects sprang up and were developed (*Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, 1920: pp. 122 *et seq*). Thus the backward limit cannot be earlier than the third century.

25. Simply because Naraka is said to have settled the twice-born people in ancient Kāmarūpa, it would be hasty to interpret his political adventure as the first attempt at Aryanisation of ancient Assam. Aryanisation of ancient Assam seems to have taken place by slow infiltration of Aryan ideas, and Aryanised gods and modes of worship. Śaivism was the prevailing religion of Assam before the advent of Naraka and it must have been introduced by some Aryan or Aryanised people. It should also be remembered that Assam was on the high road for Indian Colonists to the Far-East. They proceeded both by land and sea and the land route passed through Eastern Bengal, Manipur and Assam. (R. C. Majumdar: *Indo-Aryan Colonies in the Far-East*: Vol. I, Champa: pp. XI, XIII). It has further been said that the beginning of the Colonial kingdoms is not later than the second century A.D. (*Ibid*). It can thus be assumed that from the beginning of the Christian era, ancient Assam came in touch with the rest of Aryan India.

26. In all periods of Assam history there is mention of Brāhmaṇas and other twice-born people having

been imported into Assam from different parts of Northern India, especially Gauḍa and Mithilā by several reigning monarchs either to signalise their ascent to the throne, some victory or the building of some shrine. Naraka must have imported the twice-born to support his regime and his new cult of the goddess Kāmākhyā.

To conclude, Naraka of Mithilā was a political adventurer who established himself in power somewhere between 200-500 A.D. and introduced the Śakti cult and found in the local goddess Kāmākhyā, a manifestation of the divine energy. After his death in tragic circumstances his name got mixed up with the earlier legendary Naraka of Prāg-jyotiṣa and the author of the *Kālikā Purāṇa* collected the salient features from both the legends and built up a unified and composite figure that strides across centuries.

SAINT VAŚIṢṬHA AS THE ARBITER OF DESTINY

27. The figure of Vaśiṣṭha is made to stand at the cross-roads of political and social changes in Assamese legends. His curses cause changes in religious and social customs and the birth of new dynasties. His curses caused the downfall of king Naraka and the disappearance of goddess Kāmākhyā from the land of her origin. He cursed Śiva and goddess Ugratārā, and the result was the initiation of *vāmācāra* (left hand) rites in ancient Kāmarūpa. In a later legend he is found to curse god Indra and cause the emergence of a new dynasty of kings. This legend occurs in the chronicles of the Āhom (Shan) kings and is as follows.

There was a mountain called Bihagādri to the east of the region called Saumāra Pīṭha (easternmost Assam). Saint Vaśiṣṭha was dwelling in a cave of that mountain

and doing penances. Once a while god Indra came down from heaven and carried on amorous sports with queen Śacī and other heavenly women near about the herimtage and thus made it impure. The indignant saint cursed Indra to the effect that he would have sexual commerce with a *daitya* woman. Indra was at once transformed and had coition with a *daitya* woman. Then Indra granted a boon to that woman saying that the son in her womb would become a king. This is the origin of the Āhom kings of the Indra dynasty. This story is repeated in other chronicles with variations. Thus from the *Kālikā Purāṇa* downwards the name of *Vaśiṣṭha* is conveniently utilised to explain the emergence of new facts in history.

28. The Vaśiṣṭha legend seems to go back to Buddhist *Tantras* and thence to be first introduced into the *Kālikā Purāṇa* whence it ramified into later documents. According to the Buddhist *Tantras*,—the *Brahma Yāmala* and the *Rudra Yāmala*, Vaśiṣṭha, the son of Brahmā got a sacred mystic formula (*mantra*) from his father and meditated on it for a long time. When no result accrued, he requested his father for a second and more potent formula. Brahmā asked him to continue his concentration for some time longer and meditate on goddess Buddheśvarī according to the *Atharvavedic* process. According to *Rudra Yāmala*, Vaśiṣṭha went to the seashore but according to *Brahma Yāmala*, he went to the Kāmākhyā hill for necessary penances and meditations. When once again he found no result accruing he cursed the goddess (Buddheśvarī). The goddess pointed out that he was pursuing a wrong procedure. The method of contemplating her was quite unknown to the Vedas but of very common knowledge in Mahācīna (Tibet),

where Buddhist rites prevailed. Should Vaśiṣṭha proceed there and receive instructions from Buddha he would be successful. Vaśiṣṭha went there but to his surprise he discovered Buddha heavily intoxicated and surrounded by an assemblage of naked men and women all given to wine and flesh. Vaśiṣṭha was turning back in disgust, but he was warned by an aerial voice not to go back on seeing these un-Vedic practices. Vaśiṣṭha was initiated into the mysteries of the five M's. and got spiritual success (B. Bhaṭṭācāryya : *Sādhana Mālā* Vol. II, 1928 : pp. CXL. CXLI).

The *Tārā Tantra* specifying the formula on which Vaśiṣṭha meditated says that it related to goddess Tārā. The *Yoginī Tantra* supports this and adds the further detail that he carried on his meditation on the Kāmākhyā hill. That Kāmarūpa was a fertilising soil for the development of the Tārā formula is also stated in the Buddhist *Tantra, Manju-Śrī Mūla-Kalpa* (Verse, 900). The account of the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is different. It does not connect Vaśiṣṭha's penance with Tārā or any other goddess. It simply states that Vaśiṣṭha after having cursed Kāmākhyā went to the Sandhyācala hill and meditated on Śiva.

Thus the legend of Vaśiṣṭha seems to have been built up of details furnished by different *Tantras*. A consistency seems at first to have been given to it by the *Kālikā Purāṇa* whence it seems to have migrated to later accounts.

It is worth mentioning, however, that there is a sacred place called Vaśiṣṭhāśrama, Vaśiṣṭha's hermitage about ten miles to the east of the town of Gauhati. A Śiva temple stands attached to the hermitage. There is also a temple in the town of Gauhati sacred to Ugratārā where according to the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, the navel of *Satī* fell.

CHAPTER IV

THE MOTHER GODDESS, KĀMĀKHYĀ

29. Goddess Kāmākhyā is the most dominating name in the early history of Assam. It was under her banner that the first empire in early Assam was built. It was over her emergence and recognition as the presiding deity of the state that the Śaivites and the Vaiṣṇavites went into silent conflict and Naraka the first builder of the state lost his life. Later religious history also centres round her and other goddesses recognised as her varied manifestations. The picture of Goddess Kāmākhyā as presented in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is a composite figure made up of conceptions imported from outside in different epochs in the history of the evolution of the original Mother Goddess herself. Naraka's Kāmākhyā has been patterned on the earlier conception of the Mother Goddess as a primordial deity associated with and patronised by Viṣṇu. The other figures of Kāmākhyā as a virgin and as a spouse of Śiva belong to later periods. All these conceptions have been rolled into one in the portrait of the goddess as pictured in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*. In the following pages an attempt is made to examine into the myths and legends that clustered around the origin of the goddess. The two principal Sanskrit works that bear upon the subject are the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and the *Yoginī Tantra*, both composed in or near about ancient Assam.

The shrine of the goddess Kāmākhyā is situated about three miles from the present town of Gauhati and about

fifty miles from the range of hills inhabited by two aboriginal matriarchal tribes, the Khāsis and the Gāros,—the former belonging to the Austro-Asiatic stock and the latter to the Mongolian stock.

30. The name of the hillock where the shrine stands is Nīlācala (blue mountain). According to the *Kālikā Purāṇa* the genital organ of Satī fell here when her dead body was carried hither and thither in frantic sorrow by her husband Śiva. The mountain represented the body of Śiva himself and when Satī's genital organ fell on it, the mountain turned blue (64/59). The goddess herself is called Kāmākhyā, because she came there secretly to satisfy her amour (*kāma*) with him (64/1). Thus the derivations of the *Kālikā Purāṇa* make the mountain both a grave-yard and a secret love-tryst of the goddess.

Other variants of the name are Kāmā, Kāmadā etc. (64/2). The element,—*ākhyā* often appears as a pleonastic derivative after other less known names of the goddess; e.g. Śivākhyā, Nādākhyā, Brahmākhyā, Haṅsākhyā &c. (*Kūrmapurāṇa*: Part I. Chap. XII). Thus the goddess may be called either Kāmākhyā or Kāmā. In one place she is referred to as Kāmā (64/79). The *Kālikā Purāṇa* mentions one river called Kāmā, east of Svarṇa-Śrī (modern Suban-Siri).

The temple is unique from other temples of the Devī in different parts of India in that it enshrines no image of the goddess. Within the temple there is a cave, in a corner of which stands a block of stone on which the symbol of a *Yoni* has been sculptured. The stone is kept moist from the oozings of a natural spring within the cave. The offerings of flowers and leaves are made on the *Yoni*. In other respects the daily rites and ceremonies

are those of the goddess Kālī with sacrifices of various animals. The females of animals are exempted from sacrifice.

If the *Kālikā Purāṇa* gives an amorous interpretation of the origin of the Yoni-goddess, the *Yoginī Tantra* takes no notice of the myth and gives a different account stressing the creative symbolism of the *Yoni*. In answer to a query by the Devī as to who Kāmākhyā was Śiva replies that Kāmākhyā is the same as Kālī, the eternal in the form of Brahma. Then Śiva tells a story about the origin of Kāmākhyā.

31. In primeval times Brahmā after having created the universe arrogated to himself the supreme creative force. The goddess noticed this arrogance of Brahmā and created out of her own body a demon named Keśī. As soon as born the demon rushed towards Brahmā to swallow him up. Brahmā fled in terror in the company of Viṣṇu. The demon then built a city called Keśīpura and began to harass the three worlds. There was all around the echo of a sound—"Kill Brahmā". Brahmā cast aside his vanity and in the company of Viṣṇu offered a hymn of propitiation to Kālī for the relief of the worlds from the tyranny of Keśī. The goddess was satisfied and confessed that the demon was her own creation for the punishment of Brahmā for his ignorant arrogance. She then uttered the syllable of destruction (*huṁ*) and burnt up the demon to ashes. Then she gave directions to Brahmā for his deliverance from the sin of ignorance and arrogance. Brahmā was to create a mountain out of the ashes of the burnt demon. The mountain should not be too high nor too low. It should be covered over with edible grasses for cattle. Brahmā's sin would be diminished in proportion to the quantity of grasses consumed

by cattle. She went on further to say that on the spot wherefrom they had offered her prayer for the destruction of the demon, there was springing up in their very presence a *Yoni*-circle out of her own creative energy and it should be regarded as the source and origin of all things. In future Brahmā should create after having contemplated the *Yoni*. But just then Brahmā was debarred from seeing the *Yoni* until by his penance and purification he had brought down a luminous light from the sky and placed it on the *Yoni*-circle. For his good as well as the good of the world she had created the *Yoni*-circle and placed it in Kāmarūpa &c. Brahmā accordingly created a mountain by sprinkling holy water from his jug and called it *Go-vardhana* (cattle nourisher) and planted a *tulasī*, and called it *Vṛndā-vana*, according to goddess Kālī's directions (*Yoginī Tantra*. Part I. Chap. 15.)

32. The noticeable points in this myth, are : (a) Kāmākhyā was a new goddess unknown to the Devī herself. Śiva establishes the identity of Kālī and Kāmākhyā in the symbol of a *Yoni* ; (b) the supreme creative force of Brahmā is challenged. He could thenceforth create only with the blessings of the *Yoni* as the sole creative principle ; (c) in both the accounts of the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and the *Yoginī Tantra* there is mention of a burial or cremation ground.

Thus the two scriptures put divergent interpretations about the *Yoni*-circle as a symbol of sex and as a symbol of creation. These may embody the views of two different sets of people who professed that cult in different periods of time.

33. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* harmonises the amorous conception of the goddess with the dread goddess Kālī

by presenting the picture of a goddess in three-fold aspects assumed in different moods. In her amorous mood the goddess holds a yellow garland in her hand and stands on a red lotus placed on a white corpse. When her amour is gone, she takes up the sword and stands on a bare white corpse. In her mood of benevolence (Kāmadā) she mounts upon a lion. So she assumes one form or another according to her whims (Kāmarūpiṇī) (*Kālikā Purāṇa* 60/55 *et. seq.*)

The original Kāmākhyā temple was destroyed under Moslem invasion early in the sixteenth century and the present temple was re-built in 1665 A.D. by king Naranārāyaṇa, the Coch king of Coch Bihar and fitted with all the paraphernalia of a mediaeval Hindu temple. What the original forms and features of the temple worship were it is difficult to say. There is a tradition amongst the local priesthood who were imported from abroad by the Coch king that the former worshippers of the goddess were Gāros and pigs were offered as sacrifices.

When Naraka founded a kingdom in early Assam he established himself as the custodian of this *Yoni*-goddess, and in conformity to her name he changed the name of the kingdom from Prāg-jyotiṣapura to Kāmarūpa. The people whom he conquered were Kirātas—strong, ferocious, ignorant, and addicted to meat and drink. They had shaven heads and their skin was yellow as gold (*K.P.* 39/104 *et seq.*). As they were the original inhabitants, the goddess might have been in the keeping of a section of these people.

34. It has now been held that the cult of the Mother Goddess was introduced into India by Aryans who seem to have adopted it from the Babylonians when they still inhabited the countries in the neighbourhood

of Mesopotamia. In Babylon she was known as Ishtar. She was called the gracious mother of creation and the mother of gods and mankind. She became terrible in her wrath and struck down the people with wasting diseases. Her sacred mount was the lion and her most favourite sacrificial animal was the buffalo. In other respects also the resemblance between Ishtar and Durgā is so striking that it cannot be disregarded as superficial (Venkataramanayya : *Rudra-Śiva*, 1941, pp. 61-63). The *Kūrma Purāṇa* (1/12) gives *Sinivālī* as one of the thousand names of the Devī. It has now been shewn that the word is connected with Babylonian *Sinn*, the moon god.

As the innumerable names of the goddess are mostly names of local goddesses both Aryan and non-Aryan, it may be suspected that the formation *Kāmā* in *Kāmākhyā* is of extra-Aryan origin. There is a strong suggestion of its correspondence to Austric formations like the following : *Kamoi*, Demon ; *Kamoit*, Devil ; *Komin*, Grave ; *Kamet*, Corpse (Khasi) ; *Kamru*, a god of the Santals (B. Kakati : *Assamese, Its formation and Development ;* 1941 ; p. 53). By analogy the name of the kingdom *Kāmarūpa* may be equated to *Kamru* and *Pau*, a hill. The demon *Keśī* homonymous with the one killed by Kṛṣṇa and read in the context of word play on *Govardhana* and *Vṛndā-vana* may be equated to Austric (Khasi) *Kseh*, a pine tree.

The formations in the *Kamoi*-category suggest varied associations with the grave and its spirit. The *Kāmā* goddess might have been originally a spirit of the graveyard and represented ancestor spirit in the form of an Ancestral Mother. In this respect whether *Kāmā* has any relationship both in sound and meaning with the

Japanese Shinto gods called *Kami* cannot be determined for want of sufficient information. Shinto *Kami* is a wide term and includes nature gods, god-men, ancestors (C. C. Martindale; *The Religions of the World* 1931 ; p. 27).

35. In connection with *Kami*-gods another noteworthy point is that simple Shinto temples contain no images but only symbols like a mirror, symbolic of the shining of the sun-goddess (*Ibid.* p. 27). The *Kāmākhyā* temple also contains no image (§30), but a symbol, a *Yoni* representing the procreative force of the Mother Goddess. The *Yoni* symbol is regarded as a source of potent magic influence in Japan : "The richly attired Japanese make a point of placing cowry shells with their clothes when they put them away for luck. If a cowry happen to be unobtainable, a pornographic picture representing the female genital organ serves as a substitute" (Briffault; *The Mothers* Vol. III, p. 278). "Near Yeddo in Japan is a grotto in which there is a colossal but realistic sculpture of a *Yoni* to which pilgrims pay attention now as they have done for ages past ; this sculpture has been worn smooth and polished from the myriads of kisses and caresses with the tongue that have been bestowed upon it by devout worshippers" (O. A. Wall : *Sex and Sex Worship*, 1922 ; p. 481). Again, "the Japanese believe that the spirits of mothers look from the other world after the welfare of their children" (Briffault : Vol. I, p. 148).

Another common custom is the blackening of teeth by women. The non-white teeth of Assamese women have been noticed by the *Yoginī Tantra* (§ 42). It has to be added that Assamese women even now blacken their teeth in the country side. In Japan "the fashion of blackening their teeth is still common in some parts

among peasant women and was practised by the Emperor himself until recently. This is a mark of the decidedly matriarchal legend of origination of the Imperial family traced back to Goddess Amaterasu (Ehrenfels: *The Mother-Right in India*, 1941, p. 197). In the Malay archipelago also women blacken their teeth (Westermarck: *The History of Human Marriage*, pp. 166, 182).

Reference may also be made to the legends and facts of female predominance. There is a belief amongst the Naga tribes of Assam that a village in the north-east is entirely peopled by women who are visited by traders from the surrounding tribes and thus enabled to keep up their numbers (*Imperial Gazetteer of India*; *Provincial Series*: *Eastern Bengal and Assam*, 1909; p. 476). With reference to Japan it has been said that it is a remarkable and unexampled fact that a very large and important part of the best literature produced by Japan was written by women:.....Feminine chieftains are frequently mentioned in the old histories, and several even of the Mikados were women. Indeed the Chinese seem to have thought that the monstrous regiment of women was the rule in Japan at this time, at least they styled it "The Queen Country" (W. G. Aston: *Japanese Literature*, 1907; pp. 55, 56).

In connection with the ethnic affiliations of the Japanese people, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (fourteenth edition) writes as follows:—"Recent discussions tend to emphasise the importance of a Malay-Polynesian element in the Japanese language and customs. Malayan types also are found amongst the people."

36. On the basis then of similarities in mere sound and sense in the formations Skt. *Kāmā*, Austric *Kamoi*, Shinto *Kami* and also on the basis of correspondence of

certain rites and customs, it may be tentatively assumed that the *Yoni*-goddess sprang up amongst peoples with leanings towards ancestor-worship and believing in the protective powers of an Ancestral Mother and that she migrated into Assam with the migrations of the Austric peoples. There are two contradictory theories about the migrations of the Austric peoples from the east to the west and from the west to the east. But from whichever direction they might have migrated linguistic evidences shew that Indo-China was one of their strongholds in north-east Asia with their representatives in the Khāsis within about fifty miles from the temple of Kāmākhyā.

THE SPOUSE GODDESS PĀRVATĪ

37. The religious history of Assam immediately after Naraka's death is obscure. The *Kālikā Purāṇā* is silent about it and the cryptic account of the *Yoginī Tantra* is not sufficiently informative (§ 16). In the Naraka episode there is no mention of Kāmākhyā being any way associated with Śiva. She was discovered and established by Viṣṇu and she fought by his side against Naraka after his lapse from righteousness. When the *Kālikā Purāṇa* takes up her story again, a new world has come into being and a new *motif* into operation. She is no longer the primordial Mother Goddess whom Naraka was enjoined to worship, but an amorous wife living in inseparable companionship with her husband for secret love. She had long parted company with Viṣṇu and after her incarnation as Pārvatī finds herself hidden in Nīlācala in expectation of Śiva's love.

The new *motif* is sex or *kāma* (eros) and from that point of view every detail has been re-conceived and re-

presented. Some of the salient features of the new picture are noted below.

38. The suggested etymology of the name of the land itself Kāmarūpa is redolent of the newly born eros. Kāmarūpa is so called because Kāma, the god of love regained his form (*rūpa*) here after having long ago been burnt by the wrath of Śiva (53/79). A place sacred to him has been assigned (81/87). Śiva has his hermitages in six quarters of the land and in the middle of the land Pārvatī dwells in the Nīlācala hill. In the north-eastern direction is the principal hermitage of Śiva on the Nāṭaka hill where Śiva dwells in soft dalliance with Pārvatī (53/79). There is a tank near about where Śiva indulges in water sports with the goddess (83-12). The local name of the goddess is Kāmākhyā ; she is so called because she came in for secret amour (*kāma*) with him (64/1). In a hill near about called Bhasma-Kūṭa dwells the goddess Urvaśī. Formerly she was placed in charge of divine nectar for the gods, but she took away that nectar for the goddess Kāmākhyā and dwells here. She lives under the protection of Siva and supplies daily nectar to the Yoni circle (82/34). There is a river called Suvarṇa-Śrī far to the east. It has been so named because the currents of the river wash away the gold particles mixed with sandal paste that Śiva applies to her body when she prepares herself for her bath (83/18). She is also called Lalita-Kāntā, because there is none else so beautiful and graceful as she (83/66). When Śiva became petrified as a *linga* where the *Yoni* fell, other gods like Brahmā, and Viṣṇu also got petrified out of sympathy with him. But just as Śiva assumed his proper image to carry on dalliance with Kāmā (Kāmākhyā) so other gods also put on their proper forms when they felt the urge of sex

(64/79). Śiva alone cannot grant any boon to any devotee, the approval of Pārvatī was also necessary (53/121).

Thus this new account glitters with varied emphasis on sex and sense. A new *motif* has come into play and fresh conceptions have been imported. In order to give something like a canonical sanction to this new outlook, the ancient legend of the Satī's dead body has been drawn upon and fresh applications made of it. The newly discovered sacred places are made to have some sort of association with Satī's body.

39. The *Devī Bhāgavata* gives the names of one hundred and eight places that were one way or another associated with Satī's body. Kāmākhyā is not included in the list. The easternmost region referred to is Puṇḍra Vardhana with goddess Pāṭalā. (*Skandha* 7, Chapter 30). But in a supplementary list mentioning the names of prominent places dear to the Devī, Kāmākhyā finds a place along with Guhya-Kālī of Nepāla and Nīla-Sarasvatī of China. Kāmākhyā has been described as a *Yoni* circle presided over by Mahāmāyā where the goddess menstruates every month. The sex emphasis is there in the reference to a menstruating goddess. But she has no association with the Satī's body.

The *Kālikā Purāṇa* rehandles the old myth and makes some parts of Satī's body fall in ancient Assam. It brings ancient Assam within the boundary of Śākta Aryandom by plainly declaring that "as much of the eastern land as was covered by wandering Śiva with Satī's body on his shoulders should be regarded as sacrificial lands (*yājñiko deśah*)." Śiva rose frantic with sorrow with the corpse of his wife on his shoulder and proceeded to the eastern countries. Her sex organ fell

on Kāma-giri (Nīlācala) and her navel a little to the east of it (Ugratārā) and her head a little beyond Kāmarūpa (*Kāmarūpāttaḥ śiraḥ*). The exact location of the place where the head fell is not mentioned. But it may be presumed to be Dikkaravāsinī and Lalita-Kāntā, the eastern frontier of ancient Kāmarūpa and the eastern limit of the sacrificial ground (18/37). Other limbs fell in other places not connected with Kāmarūpa.

Thus places like Kāmākhyā, Ugratārā, Lalita-Kāntā have been given a new orientation by being grafted into the ancient classical myth. The new emphasis on sex and sense is sought to be derived from the presence of the *Yoni* and the menstruating goddess installed in the place of the older Mother Goddess.

40. In the Naraka legend the reference to the goddess seems to have been in terms of "Mahāmāyā, Ambikā, the Mother of the world" (39/51). But the new orientation as an amorous goddess caught on in popular fancy and stories about the sex appeal of the goddess began to circulate. There is a popular story that Naraka was captivated by the charms of Kāmākhyā and made overtures of love to her. The wily goddess agreed to accept his offer on condition that in the course of one night, he should construct a temple, a tank and a masonry road from the foot of the hill. Naraka nearly completed the construction when under secret inspiration from the goddess, a cock crew before it was day-break and Naraka's love remained a dream. There is another popular story about the Koch king. It had been given out that at the time of the evening prayer the goddess danced within closed doors in the temple. The king desired to see the dancing goddess and asked the chief priest Kendu Kalāi to make a device. The king was

advised to peep through a hole in the wall. As he did so his eyes caught the eyes of the goddess. The goddess grew irate and tore off the head of the priest. The king and his future descendants were forbidden on dire penalty to cast a look even at her very hill. Whatever the fact the prohibition is said to be observed even now and the local descendants of the Koch kings are said to pass by the hill under cover of umbrellas.

The sex concept alone would not have created an atmosphere which made such sacrilegious stories possible or created an itching in the king to peep through the closed doors of the temple. Along with the new conception fresh accessories were imported into the worship. Kāmākhyā was identified with Tripurā (66/50), one aspect of whom Tripura-bālā (the girl Tripurā) with a bow and arrows of flowers in her hand stood as the symbol of eternal beauty and sex (78/100). Tripura-bālā could be worshipped both in the Right-hand (*dakṣiṇācāra*) and Left-hand manners (78/124). And the Left-hand worship often required the worship of an actual living girl. There was also the institution of virgin worship. No caste distinction was to be observed in selecting a virgin and if in the process of worship the devotee was stricken with amour, he went to heaven (*Yoginī Tantra* 1/17/31). Then in the worship of certain other aspects of the goddess, practices reeking of gross sensuality were enjoined. The devotee was to keep night vigils in the company of dancers, musicians and prostitutes (61/88). On the tenth day of the autumnal worship people were enjoined upon to sing loud songs naming the sex organs in the company of finely dressed virgins and prostitutes. They were also to throw rice, flowers, dust and mud at one another &c. Failure to

join the revelry would bring down the wrath of the goddess upon the delinquents. This was called the *Śabarotsava* (63/19-).

41. Kāmākhyā herself admitted of being worshipped both according to the Right-hand and the Left-hand methods (78/140). Moreover, there was no restriction to foreigners about the mode of Kāmākhyā worship. They could worship the goddess according to the practices current in their native localities. In other countries conformity to local customs was enjoined but in Kāmarūpa foreigners were exempted from conformity to local rites and ceremonies (68/33-37). Kāmarūpa is the favourite haunt of the Devī. No other place is like it. In other places the Devī is rare but in Kāmarūpa, she dwells in every house (60/41). Every woman in Kāmarūpa is a miniature incarnation of the goddess.

Most of the practices mentioned above came from outside. The *Yoginī Tantra* seems to hint at the foreign origin of virgin worship in narrating the history of its migration. At first king Viśvambhara of Kāñcī (Conjeeveram in Madras) worshipped a virgin of the prostitute class. Then high-souled Kāmpilya worshipped a virgin at a place named after him (United Provinces). Then a demon king named Kolāsura worshipped the virgin in the Himalayas (*Y.T.* 1/17/44-). The *Śabarotsava* must have come from the land of the Śabaras in the Vidhya hills. The practice of singing lewd songs in connection with the Devī's worship and the dance of naked women before her image is said to be in vogue in some parts of South India (Dr. Venkataramanayya; *Rudra-Śiva* 1941 pp. 59, 60).

Rites and ceremonies of this sort produced a kind of hot-house atmosphere which led the *Yoginī Tantra* to

describe all avenues and places of worship in Kāmarūpa as so many *Yonis*. It characterises Kāmarūpa as a land of nine *Yonis* which include *Vīthi* (avenue) *Upa-Vīthi* (branch avenue); *Pīṭha*, holy site; *Upa-pīṭha*, *Siddha-pīṭha*; *Mahā-pīṭha*; *Brahma-pīṭha*; *Viṣṇu-pīṭha*; and *Rudra-pīṭha*.

The *Yoni* symbol has thus been raised to the height of a pantheistic conception. The *Yoginī Tantra* quotes *Kālikā Purāṇa* to reiterate that every woman in Kāmarūpa is an image of the Devī herself (2/6/150). There every man is a god and every sinless person a Śiva (1/11/-).

It is no wonder that charged with notions like these popular imagination would invent stories about Naraka's offer of love to the goddess or a mediaeval king would feel a curiosity to peep through a hole in the wall to look at the dancing goddess or a virgin damsel posing as the Tripurā girl!

42. Reviewing the customs prevalent in different parts of ancient Assam the *Yoginī Tantra* characterises the local religion as being of Kirāta origin (2/9/9). It takes note of the absence of asceticism, celibacy and protracted vows; it enjoins fish and flesh eating, free association with women and sexual intercourse after puberty. The teeth of the women are black (non-white) and they are constantly addicted to betelnut chewing. In a region called Saumāra in the east of Assam people eat everything and sell everything. In another region called Kolva Pīṭha further east, people follow laws framed by their own tribesmen (2/9/13-18). Thus ancient Assam presents the picture of a land of natural instincts free from all rigours of self-mortification. The picture

would be complete if the infinite varieties of sexual relationship actually subsisting amongst the Kirāta people (aboriginal tribes) are taken into consideration,—polygamy with right to inherit a dead father's widows except the mother, polyandry, pre-nuptial sexual freedom and licence festivals in honour of tribal gods and goddesses. These institutions must have had usual repercussions on the Aryanised people and given a wide berth to Vāmācāra practices.

43. The companionship of a woman is the prime requisite of a Vāmācārī devotee. When women are not available for love they are procured by money or force. Lama Tārānātha has recorded a few adventures of this type (*Mystic tales of Lama Tārānātha*: translated by Dr. Bhupendranath Datta: 1944). There is the story of a *guru*, Jñānamitra and his disciple Śāntigupta. After two years said the *guru* to his disciple, "Now is the time to give you *abhiṣeka*. In the house lying on the other side of the river, there lives a lady who is fit to be prepared for all methods of *tantras*; bring her to me". Swimming in the evening the disciple came to the house. It was the elephant house of a Kṣatriya king in the city of Langakara. The girl belonged to the master of the house, and as she was well protected she could not be overpowered. The disciple bound her by magic *dhāraṇis* (spells), so that the woman might not utter a word. He put her on his shoulders and came away and brought her before the *guru*. The *guru* said, "Now is the time" and gave him *abhiṣeka* next morning. The people of the elephant house who followed him, believed that both of them had been carried away by the water and did not come further. The woman later on became famous as Yoginī Menakā. There is also the story of Vaidyapāda.

He was a Brāhmaṇa born in a frontier place. He needed a Cāṇḍāla girl for the support of his magic and got one by giving her parents gold procured miraculously as high as her stature! Ācārya Vaidyapāda taught Avadhūti Yogī Ratnaśila of Kāmaru. The Kāyastha Vṛddha of Dharmapāla learnt from him too." (*Ibid* pp. 66, 42, 43).

The *Kālikā Purāṇa* itself in its choice and treatment of ancient myths and legends and in the invention of new ones has given something like a canonical sanction to all kinds of sexual aberrations. It opens with Brahmā's incestuous passion for his own mind-born daughter Sandhyā and closes with his illicit passion for Amoghā. In between are the stories of Boar's sexual commerce with goddess Earth during her menstruation, Kāpota Muni's illicit passion for Tārāvatī (chapter 51), Kakutstha's dalliance with Urvaśī (51), a Kāpālika's ravishment of Tārāvatī (52), Rambhāsura's outrage upon a girl of three years and the birth of demon Mahiṣa (62), Pārvatī's self-forgetful appearance in *dishabille* before Bhṛngī and Mahākāla (49). Lord Śiva himself attempted ravishing Sāvitrī whom he mistook for his wife during her temporary absence! (52).

The philosophy of atonement for ravishment put into the mouth of Kāpota Muni is too shocking for modern taste. Says the Muni, "Formerly a married woman named Pramlocā was desired by the son of Batanda, so was married Padmā desired by Bharadvāja. I also desire this married woman (Tārāvatī). I shall later on wash off the sin of ravishing another man's wife by merits accruing from penances (51/41,). Expressions like *udīritāngaḥ; saṁkledaḥ samajāyata* (85/11, 86/11) are too realistic for translation.

THE VIRGIN GODDESS, TRIPURĀ

44. If Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā has been identified with the wife goddess Pārvatī, she has also been completely assimilated to a virgin goddess of beauty and sex, Tripurā (*K.P.* 66/50) and a considerable section of the *Kālikā Purāṇa* has been devoted to the exposition of the rites of her worship. The cult of the virgin worship and of the sensual aspect of the Devī worship seems to be derived from the cult of Tirpurā.

The concept of Tripurā and her exploits through several manifestations has been set forth in the *Tripurā Rahasya* (*Māhātmya Kḥaṇḍa*, The Kashi Sanskrit series 1932) edited by Pandit Mukunda Lala Śāstri.

In the *Yoginī Tantra* (1/6/17), a Śākta devotee is enjoined to contemplate the mental image of a girl of sixteen shining like the newly risen sun, all naked. The devotee is to concentrate his mind on every part of her body and then think of his own body as being fully assimilated to the mental picture. In other words, "the ambition of every pious follower of the system is to become identical with Tripurā Sundarī and one of his religious exercises is to habituate himself to think that he is a woman. The followers of the Śakti school justify their appellation by the belief that god is a woman and it ought to be the aim of all to become a woman" (Dr. Bhandarkar: p. 146).

The *Tripurā Rahasya* furnishes certain details about the emergence of this goddess. The female figure of the devotee's contemplation is the Primordial Energy embodied as Mahādevī (The Great Goddess). The whole world static and moving is her sport (*T.R.* 57/66). This Primordial Energy is to be pictured as a woman (*T.R.* 58/3), because pleasure is the very nature of consciousness and intelligence and so even animals are fond of pleasures. Now the female form is both beautiful and pleasure giving (*śukhāvahaṁ sundarañca*) when actually seen and so it is contemplated by people as a pleasing instrument of spiritual success (*sukhasādhanabhāvataḥ*).

46. This female figure manifested herself first as a virgin (*kumārī*). Then she divided herself into three aspects called Trirūpā and then further on into Gaurī, Ramā, Bhāratī, Kālī, Caṇḍikā, Durgā, Bhāgavatī, Kātyāyanī, Parā, Lalitā, Śrīmahārājñī. Their exploits are described separately in the text of the *Purāṇa*.

The goddess was called a virgin (*kumārī*), because she was her own mistress and by virtue of her own independent status (*sva-svātantryavaśena*) created the universe according to her desire (10/14). In this context, a virgin does not convey the modern meaning of chaste, unspotted; it means unwed, unmarried, and thus free from anybody's control. The Virgin Ishtar is frequently addressed as the prostitute. The sacred prostitutes or hierodules in her temples were also called "the holy virgins" (Briffault: *Mothers*, Vol. III. pp. 169-170).

This goddess created nine Śaktis (Powers) called Kāmeśvarī, Bhagamālinī, (bearing a garland of *bhagas*, sex-organs), Nityaklinnā (always moist), Bheruṇḍā (pregnant) &c .... and also nine Yoginīs (attendants) called Prakaṭā (Visible), Guptā, (Hidden) &c (56/7). The goddess herself dwells in the centre of nine triangles placed within one another, the whole being encompassed by one circle. This is called Śrīcakra. Here situated within this circle she is called Mahātripurasundarī. She divides herself into nine parts and presides over all the triangles, her several names being Tripurā, Tripureśī,

Tripurasundarī, Tripuravāsinī, Tripuraśrī, Tripuramālinī, Tripurasiddhā, Tripurāmbikā, Mahātripurasundarī (57/56-). Whoever erects a Śrīcakra is entitled to endless bliss (80/15-). This triangle is called the feminine triangle of the *mons veneris*. It is used in this sense in innumerable figures of the goddesses in Egyptian temple ruins (Wall : *Sex and Sex-worship*).

She dwells in her own real self in three places ; Kāmagiri (Kāmākhyā hill), Jalandhara, and Pūrṇagiri near the sea. Then in twelve manifestations she dwells in twelve places, as (1) Kāmākṣī (The lovely-eyed) in Kāñcīpura ; (2) Kumāri, (The virgin) in Kerala ; (3) Sundarī (The beautiful) in Vanga ; (4) Guhyakeśvarī (The Lady of the Guhyakas) in Nepal : (5) Bhramarī in Malaya ; (66) Ambā in Anarta ; (7) Mahālakṣmī in Keravīṛa ; (8) Kālikā in Mālava (9) Lalitā in Prayāga ; (10) Vindhyavāsinī in the Vindhya hills ; (11) Viśālākṣhī in Benares ; (12) Mangalavatī in Gayā (48/69-74).

47. Perhaps because Goddess Kāmākhyā is worshipped in the symbol of a *Yoni*, this lovely goddess presiding over the circle of feminine triangles has been superimposed upon her in her own complete self. In the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, the Tripurā goddess is adored in three aspects as Tripurabālā (The virgin) ; Tripura Sundarī (Tripurā, the beautiful) ; Tripurabhairavī (The goddess of infatuation). (*K.P.* 78/86).

Tripurasundarī has three poses in all three of which she is contemplated, the middle pose being the focus of concentration. The form is that of a female complete with all good bodily signs, adorned with varied ornaments. It is of the splendour of the rising sun, full of the freshness of youth ; seated on a couch of lotus flowers, with fully developed breasts, bejewelled, with three folding wrinkles

of flesh round the belly, slightly intoxicated with drink, pleasing to the eye and causing heaving undulations of passions in the world (*K.P.* 67/55). In the first and third poses she is naked (66/89; 62/66). Tripurabālā carries a flowery bow with five flowery arrows and a noose (*K.P.* 78/100-). Tripurabhairavī is red in colour and dressed in red garments. She is dazzling like a thousand suns with eyes rolling with intoxication of drink (*K.P.* 78/93). Tripurabālā may be worshipped according to the Right or the Left hand rites, but Tripurabhairavī must be worshipped according to the Left hand method (*K.P.* 78/125). The Bhairavī is the most dominating manifestation (*K.P.* 78/87).

The six attendants are suggestive of the eroticism with which she is regarded. They are Bhagā (*bhaga*= female sex-organ) ; Bhagajihvā (clitoris) ; Bhagāsyā (the mouth of *bhaga*) ; Bhagamālinī ; Bhagodarī ; Bhagārohā (mount of venus). The names of the other attendants begin with the formative prefix *ananga*—(eros), eg. Anangakusumā (carrying love flowers) : Anangamekhalā (having a girdle of love) &c. .... (*K.P.* 67/2-5), Whatever is red is dear to the goddess : spirituous liquor, red-flower, red clothing, and vermilion (79/76). Whatever excites passion or fear should be referred to the Bhairavī. On seeing a drinking vessel or a woman dressed in red, or a human skull, one should bethink oneself of the goddess. On seeing a bevy of youthful women, beautiful and well-dressed, one should greet them in the name of the Bhairavī (*K.P.* 78/115).

48. The following is the most authoritative account about the mode of worship of the goddess. "It consists in the worship of a picture of the female organ drawn in the centre of another consisting of a representation of

nine such organs, the whole of which forms the Śrīcakra. The pictures are drawn on a Bhūrja leaf or a piece of silken cloth or on a gold leaf. With reference to this worship it must be observed that there are two classes of Śāktas : (1) Kaulika and (2) Samayin. The former worship the gross material object, while the latter have a recourse to imagery. The worship of the pictures just mentioned is resorted to by ancient (Pūrva) Kaula, while the modern (Uttara) Kaulas worship the organ of a living beautiful woman. The Kaulas worship their goddess by offering to her and themselves using wine, flesh, honey, fish and such other things. The Samayins of course abstain from such practices. There are even Brāhmaṇas who secretly profess the doctrines of the Sākta school and worship the goddess Tripura-Sundarī in accordance with the Pūrva-Kaula or Uttara-Kaula way. There are no distinctions of caste when the worship of the Bhairavīcakra is going on. Men of all castes become Brāhmaṇas, but they resume their own castes when the worship is over." (Bhandarkar : p. 146-47).

The *Yoginī Tantra's* division of the sacred places of Kāmarūpa into nine *Yonis* and its insistence on virgin-worship now becomes understandable. In a place called Muktimaṇḍapika virgins were to be fed and kept awake through the night with songs about the great goddess (2/7/22-I).

49. Rites parallel to those performed in the Devīcakra were in vogue in different parts of western Asia. In Syria there is a peculiar sect—the Nezaire. Their religion is a mixture of Christianity and sex-worship. They celebrate several festivals, the most solemn of which is the festival of the womb. On this

festival day they gather in their places of worship to perform the most sacred and solemn ceremonies of their religion ; the women bare themselves and the men salute the women with a holy respect reverently kneeling before them, embracing their thighs and humbly and devoutly kissing their abdomens and genitals which is done promiscuously." Again " in the early period of Christianity there was a sect called gnostics whose peculiar doctrine was that it is a prime duty of every man to follow the suggestions of his instincts or desires. At one of their festivals the men and women assembled in a darkened room all naked, and every man seized a woman and cohabited with her ; in the darkness this led to promiscuous and incestuous license in the name of religion. (Wall : *Sex and Sex Worship*, 1922 pp. 483, 522).

50. In view of the wide spread existence of similar practices nothing definite can be hazarded about their place of origin. But on the Indian soil the Tirpurā cult seems to have originated first in Southern India. The *Tripurā Rahasya* itself seems to be a South-Indian composition. It claims to be revealed by Mahā-Viṣṇu Dattaguru to Paraśurāma and communicated by Paraśurāma to his disciple Hāritāyana. Hāritāyana directed by his preceptor went over to the Hālāsya city to weave the instructions into a book and stayed there worshipping the goddess Mīnākṣī (chap. 2). The Kumārī (virgin) and Kāmākṣī (lovely-eyed) manifestations of the goddess also are located in South India (§ 46). The *Yoginī Tantra* has referred to Kāñcīpura as the place where the virgin was first worshipped (§ 41). References have also been made to the Śabarotsava (§§ 40/41). Other minor practices having some bearing on the topic have been referred to in the following quotation from a South Indian publi-

cation by a South Indian scholar (N. Venkataramanayya: *Rudra-Śiva,* 1941, pp. 59, 60). "Once in every year, a festival is celebrated in her honour during the harvest season, when, besides buffaloes specially sacred to her, goats, sheep and cocks are offered in large numbers. The *pūjārīs* or the priestly ministrants who officiated in her temples were formerly women; and while the service was in progress naked women had to sing and dance before the deity. Vestiges of the ministration of women in the temple of the village goddess still lurk in certain parts of south India. In Kerala, particularly in Travancore, though the Brāhmaṇas officiate as priests in the temples of Bhagavatī, a deity whose identity with the village goddess is generally recognised, the Veliceppadu or oracle is either a woman or a man dressed in the garments of a woman. More important still is the custom of fulfilling the vow of Karagam that is prevalent among certain communities in the Tamil country. To propitiate the Goddess and secure her blessings on their conjugal life, young men about to be married are dressed in woman's apparel and taken in procession to the temple of the village deity with a pot of water bedecked with flowers on their heads. Another practice which has very nearly died down is the dedication of maids as Basavis to the service of the deity. A maid so dedicated never marries, but becomes a consecrated prostitute attached to the temple. She lives with whomsoever she pleases, and her offspring are regarded as the legitimate descendants of her father. An interesting feature of the *jātrā* or the periodical festival celebrated in honour of the village deity in the Telugu country must not be left unnoticed in this connection. At the close of the festival, when the image of the deity is carried in a procession to

the boundary of the village, the Asadis, or the outcastes who officiate as priests during the function sing an obscene song in praise of her and indulge in indecent jests at the expense of the chief men of the village. It is said in explanation of this practice that the obscene songs and jests are intended to please the Goddess. The indulgence in obscenity of this kind is not unknown in other parts of South India. In Kerala, for instance, it used to be the custom until quite recently, to sing obscene songs during the Puram festival (or the festival of Bhagavatī) at Ṣhertally. At Cranganore, on the west coast, the right of distributing the *prasādam* during the Bhagavatī festival is held as a monopoly of the women folk of certain families; and they are obliged to answer any question on sex matters put at the time of distributing the *prasādam.*"

THE DREAD GODDESS, TĀMREŚVARĪ (EKAJAṬĀ)

51. In the north-east frontier of Assam is not a very considerable river named Dikrang. Dressed up in the Sanskrit garb as Dikkara-Vāsinī, it is frequently mentioned in the *Kālikā Pūrāṇa* and *Yoginī Tantra* as the easternmost boundary of ancient *Kāmarūpa.* Naraka cleared out the aboriginal Kirātas from his kingdom up to this point. In *tāntric* literature the region wherethrough this river flows was known as Saumāra. Just now this portion of land falls within the north-eastern frontier tract,—a kind of no man's land where various tribal groups, the Abors, the Miris, the Mishmis, the Khāmtis and the Maṭaks dwell. But there are literary references and archaeological ruins which shew that in ancient times certain Aryan or Aryanised colonies were established there.

Amongst the followers of Śankara Deva, (16th cent.) the great Vaishnavite reformer of Assam, there was a renowned person named Gopāla Ātā. In a prose biography of Sankara Deva, the native place and genealogy of the Ātā's family is indicated as follows. "The Ātā's place of origin was in the country of the Kalitās (Kalitā Deśa). He belonged to Kalā Kalitā's family in the village of Cek-khām-hāṭ-ji-nai. Kalā's son was Vāsudeva. His son was Harideva. His son was Śankara Dāsa. His son was Cetana Giri. His son was Sankarṣaṇa. His son was Nara Deva. His son was Kāṃa Deva. Kāma Deva's mother died and his father married again in the house of Hari Barkalitā, a girl named Satyā. The Ātā was one month old in his mother's womb, when his father died. Kāma Deva performed the last rites of his father and then demanded of his step-mother the four hundred rupees of his father that had been in her keeping. The king's officers were also invited to the *panchāyet* where the demand was made. The mother seeing no alternative to paying fled the country through high hills and big forests, through the settlements of the Abors, the Miris, the Cārimāṭi-Miris, and at the end of the fifteenth day reached Acama land" (the kingdom of the Ahoms). The child in the mother's womb was born in 1514 A.D. during the reign of the Ahom king Cuhung-Mung (1497-1539 A.D.).

From this account it appears that there was an Aryan settlement at a distance of fifteen days' march through hilly road from the Ahom territory beyond the regions occupied by the Abors and the Miris. The people bore Hindu Vaiṣṇavite names like Vāsudeva, Harideva, Sankarṣaṇa, etc. There was also a king in the land.

52. This account is corroborated by the following independent report of an English explorer. "The country to the eastward of Bhoṭ and the northward of Sadiya extending on the plain beyond the mountains is said to be possessed by a powerful nation called Kolitās or Kultās, who are described as having attained to a high degree of advancement and civilization equal to any of the nations of the East. The power, dominion and resources of the Kultā Rājā are stated to exceed by far those of Assam under its most flourishing circumstances and in former times a communication appears to have been kept up between the states, now long discontinued.

"To this nation are attributed the implements of husbandry and domestic life washed down by the flood of the Dihong (mentioned below). Of their peculiar habits and religion nothing is known though they are considered to be Hindus.....There is said to be an entrance to this country from Upper Assam by a natural tunnel under the mountains, but such is obviously fabulous, at least to the assumed extent. All accounts agree in stating that a colony of Assamese under two sons of Bara Gohain, about eight generations back, took refuge in the country of the Kalitās, on the banks of the Śrī Lohit, whence till within about two hundred years they at intervals maintained a correspondence with the parent state. They were hospitably received by the Kultā Rājā, who assigned lands to them for a settlement and they had naturalised and intermarried with the inhabitants. Since that period however, no trace either of them or the Kultās had been found until the flood of Dihong exhibited marks of their existence, or of that of a nation resembling them in an acquaintance with the useful arts. The plains to the eastward of the Kultā country beyond the

Mishmis, is well known as the country of the Lāma or the Yam Sinh Raja, a nation also independent and said to be frequently engaged in hostility with Kultās." (Captain John Bryan Neufville, *The Geography and Population of Assam;* Asiatic Researches: Vol. XVI. 1828; pp. 344-345).

The account of the flood referred to above is as follows: "In the reign of Rājeswar, little more than half a century ago a sudden and overwhelming flood poured from the Dihong inundating the whole country and sweeping away, with a resistless torrent, whole villages and even districts; such is described to be its violence, that the general features of the country and the course of the river, were materially altered by it. This flood continued for about 15 days during which time various agricultural and household implements, elephant trappings and numerous articles belonging to a race, evidently social and civilized, of pastoral and agricultural habits, were washed down in the stream" (*Ibid* pp. 335-36).

The period of Rajeswara Sinha's reign was 1751-1769 A.D. So assuming that the flotsams belonged to the Kolitā kingdom, this kingdom might be said to be in existence down to the middle of the 18th century.

53. From the copper plate inscriptions of the Pāla kings (11th cent.) also, it appears that there was an Aryan colony in the north-eastern region. In the 1st and 2nd inscriptions of Indra Pāla (11th cent.), it has been said that his father Purandara Pāla married a daughter Durlabhā belonging to the family of kings reigning over the extensive territory reclaimed by the arms of Paraśurāma (verse 13, in both the plates). Legend associates the Brahmaputra as having been set free by the axe of Paraśurāma, whence Paraśukuṇḍa.

The joint worship of Śiva and Pārvatī seems to be mentioned for the first time in the Pāla inscriptions. Indra Pāla, though a Śaiva calls himself "one whose head is adorned with the dust of the lotus feet of Hara and Girijā". Another interesting point in this inscription is the occurrence of the word Tathāgata as the name of a person, the maker of a charter, side by side with the name of another person called Paśupati. Tathāgata is one of the names of Lord Buddha and its occurrence even as a personal name points to the existence of Buddhist elements amongst the people.

54. There are other accounts testifying to the existence of civilized settlements in that part of the country. In the *Yoginī Tantra* there is one Kolva Pīṭha in the north-eastern region where moral and secular laws framed by the tribesmen themselves were followed (2/9/18). In the *Manju-Śrī-Mūla-Kalpa* also there is mention of kings bearing the title of Kala living in the valley (*kukṣi*) of the Himalayas (K. P. Jayaswal: *An Imperial History of India* 1934: verse 638). Modern explorers have discovered the ruins of two forts between the gorges of the Dikrang and the Dibong, about 24 miles north of Sadiya. The rampart is of stiff red clay which must have been brought from some distance. The debris of earthen vessels bears resemblance to the earthen ware of Gangetic India. There are four tanks, one almost as large as the famous tank at Sibsagar and brick foundations of what once must have been extensive buildings. There are the ruins of the copper temple and of four other temples: there are also the ruins of an old city in the Dafla country with two brick walls. (*Assam District Gazetteers*: Vol. VIII. Lakhimpur; 1905, pp. 91-93).

Thus it is more than a presumption that there were Aryan settlements in the region now called the north eastern frontier tracts. The people seem to have belonged to different sects of Hinduism. The ancestors of Gopāla Ātā bore Vaiṣṇavite names (§ 51). The Pāla kings seem to have been joint worshippers of Śiva and Pārvatī. There seem to have been traces of Buddhism also. Hinduism seems to have spread also amongst the aboriginals. In the biography of the Vaiṣṇavite saint Vaṁśī Gopāla Deva there are references to "Mishmi Brāhmaṇas" who often supplied him with food and drink when he lay in a trance in caves reciting the name of Hari.

55. This region is called the Saumāra Pīṭha in the *Yoginī Tantra* within the following boundary; in the east a forest named Saurāśilā; in the west the river Svarṇa-Śrī; in the south Brahmayūpa and in the north the Mānasa lake (2/1/47,-48). The *Kālikā Purāṇa* refers to it as the land under the spiritual command of goddess Dikkaravāsinī. She has two forms Tīkṣṇa-Kāntā (dreadfully attractive), and Lalita-Kāntā (gracefully attractive). Ṭīkṣṇa-Kāntā is black, pot-bellied and with one lock of matted hair (Eka-jaṭā). She is also called Ugratārā (*K.P.* 83/39). Her attendants are Bhagā, Subhagā, Cāmuṇḍā, Karālā, Bhiṣaṇā, Vikaṭā,—all dreadful names. She is to be worshipped in general like goddess Kāmākhyā, but her most delectable offerings consisted of strong spirituous liquor, human sacrifice, *modaka*, flesh curry, cocoanuts and sugar cane,—*pāneṣu madirā śastā naro baliṣu pārthiva* (*K.P.* 83/51). From her epithets Ugratārā, Ekajaṭā, she seems to have been of Buddhist origin. But she dominates later history as the dreadful goddess Tāmreśvarī calling for annual human sacrifice.

56. When and by whom this dreadful goddess came to be installed is not known. The Pālas were the last Hindu kings in that region and of the three Pāla kings whose inscriptions are available Ratnapāla was a Śaivite, Indra Pāla a joint worshipper of Śiva and Pārvatī and Dharma Pāḷa was a Vaiṣṇavite (§ 9). The *Kālikā Purāṇa* has noted a Viṣṇu Pīṭha presided over by Lord Vāsudeva in that locality. (*K.P.* 83/90). The names of Gopālā Ātā's forbears point to the prevalence of Vaiṣṇavism there. But the existence of Buddhism in some form may be guessed at from the occurrence of the word Tathāgata in the inscription of Indrapāla (§ 53). After the fall of the Pāla dynasty, certain local potentates called Bāra Bhūyās (multiple land-lords) came into power for some time in that region. They were worshippers of the Devī. And there is mention of the existence of the dread goddess at Sadiya even while they were in power. It is however not definitely known if they had anything to do with the installation of the goddess.

But the people who brought this goddess to awful prominence were the Chuṭiyās, a Mongolian tribe who were reigning at Sadiya at the beginning of the thirteenth century. She was enshrined in a copper temple and called Tāmreśvarī Devī (the goddess of the copper temple). This temple became so famous that it was at that time looked upon as a centre of worship for all the hill tribes on the north-eastern frontier. The temple is described "as a small stone building nearly square, built without cement, the stones joined by iron pins not clamped. The roof was of copper. The interior is eight feet square. The whole is enclosed within a brick wall 130 ft. by 200 ft. Near the grand entrance in the western wall is a

small stone tripod. Here human sacrifices were yearly offered." (*Gazetteer*: Lakhimpur 1905; p. 111).

The goddess was popularly referred to as Kēcāi-Khātī (eater of the raw flesh) because of the annual human sacrifice.

The temple officers were all Chuṭiyās and the priests called themselves *deoris*, a title they must have inherited from former ministrants. *Deori* is a New Indo-Aryan formation connected with Sanskrit * *deva-gṛhika*.

57. It is not clear why the temple was made of copper. It does not appear to have anything to do with the goddess. There is another Ugratārā/Ekajaṭā temple at Gauhati, which is made of stones. Perhaps it was connected with the name of the locality. The *Yoginī Tantra* takes note of a small *Pīṭha* in the north-east region called Hayatāmra (2/1-49). It may be regarded as a parallel formation to Ratna-Pīṭha, Svarṇa-Pīṭha, Hema-Pīṭha etc., names of diverse localities. The word *tāmra* also occurs in the name of a magic book called *Tāmrākṣarī*, said to have been in possession of the Bāra-Bhūyās of North Lakshmipur who were Śāktas (§ 56). It is said to have contained all kinds of potent magic formulas for the propitiation of the goddess. The goddess might have been locally known as Tāmreśvarī, as the presiding divinity of the Haya-Tāmra Pīṭha and also the divinity whose worship was extolled in the book called *Tāmrākṣarī*. The copper temple must have been a later addition to suit her epithet.

58. The dread goddess spread fascination and a shrine was set up amongst the syntengs of the Jaintia hills. The Rājās became Śāktas and were particular about the immolation of human sacrifices. Jayantī (Jaintia) is noted as one of the sacred places to the Devī

by the *Yoginī Tantra* (1/11/67). Human sacrifice continued there down to 1835, when it was stopped by the British by dispossessing the king of his territory. In the copper temple this horrid sacrifice was discontinued earlier, during the reign of king Gaurīnath Singh (1780-1795), when the Chuṭiyā priests harried by the Burmese invaders abandoned their ancient possessions in the vicinity of the temple. According to the *Deori* priests the downfall of the Ahoms was largely due to the neglect of this religious rite.

There are parallel customs amongst different aboriginal peoples in Assam. There is the practice of head-hunting and offering human sacrifices to ensure a good rice harvest amongst the Nāgās. Amongst the Khāsis there is the practice of offering human blood to the Thlen gods. A human being is killed and the hair, the tips of the fingers and a little blood is offered to the snake symbolising a Thlen god. Another centre of human sacrifice was the Tipperah hill where the offering was made to God Śiva. Association of Śiva with human sacrifice goes back to the days of the *Mahābhārata*, where Jarāsandha is said to have imprisoned conquered rulers with a view to sacrifice them to God Śiva. (J. Muir: *Original Sanskrit Texts*: Vol. IV 1863, pp. 245 ff.)

THE GREAT GODDESS

59. The Goddess of the Copper Temple, Tīkṣṇa-kāntā, Eka-jaṭā (one chignoned) or Ugratārā is a Buddhist goddess and said to be imported into the Buddhist pantheon from the country of the Bhoṭas by Nāgārjuṇa (7th century). So was Tārā also of Tibetan origin (B. Bhattacharyya: *Buddhist Esoterism* pp. 154, 155). They were later received into the Hindu *Tantras* and

identified as manifestations of Durgā or Kālī. The *Yoginī Tantra* seems to have suspected the different origins of Tārā and Kāmākhyā and prohibits thinking of them as distinct from Kālī. "Tārā is the same as Kālī, the embodiment of supreme lore. So also is Kāmākhyā. By thinking of them as different from Kālī one would go to hell" (*Y.T.* 1/2/8; 1/15/2). This gives an idea as to how independent local goddesses were affiliated to the first manifestation of the goddess as Durgā or Kālī.

60. Competent authorities have held that the existence of an independent powerful goddess has been recognised first in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṁśa*. In the *Virāta Parva* (6), a powerful goddess Durgā receives a prayer of supplication from Yudhiṣṭhira and in the *Bhīṣma Parva* (23), from Arjuṇa. She was addressed as the killer of the buffalo-demon, a dweller in the forest and as a permanent resident in the Vindhya mountains. She was fond of wine, flesh and beasts. She was the favourite of Nārāyaṇa and sister of Vāsudeva. She was born to Yasodā and dashed against the stone by Kaṁsa and went to heaven. In the Harivṁśa she is further referred to as having been worshipped by the barbarians, Śabaras and Pulindas (Chap. 59). All these scattered references seem to have been gathered up first in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* which builds up a complete myth about the origin of the goddess and her fight with the buffalo and other demons. The Seven Centuries about Durgā (*Durgā Saptaśatī*) form the basis of the worship of the goddess amongst her followers.

Once her existence was recognised and her worship formulated, all local and independent deities began to be identified with her as her local manifestations. Thus Umā, Kālī, Karālā, Cāmuṇḍā, originally independent

goddesses came to be regarded as manifestations of Durgā in different circumstances. The process of assimilation went on until in the *Devī Bhāgavata* it came to be declared that all village goddesses should be regarded as partial manifestations of the goddess. (9/1/136). Thus the concept of the Mother Goddess assumed a cosmic proportion and all unconnected local *numina* were affiliated to her. The myth about the carrying of the Satī's dead body (§ 39) was an attempt in this direction. Places that came into prominence later in point of time have been left out of reference in the story of the Satī's dead body. Thus the *Devī Bhāgavata* refers to the Kāmākhyā hill as a place dear to the goddess. No part of her body is said to have fallen there. When Kāmākhyā rose to importance, the *Kālikā Purāṇa* re-handles the myth and makes the sex-organ of the goddess fall there. Since then Kāmākhyā came to be looked upon as a vital part of the Devī's body.

Along with the local deities, local rites and customs also came to be recognised and tolerated. The *Yoginī Tantra* lays down that the local customs of a particular *Pītha* should be regarded as having canonical sanctions. The regional laws and customs governing drink should not be violated (*Y.T.* 2/9/9).

61. The list of sacrificial animals enumerated in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is very wide: birds, tortoises, alligators, fish, nine species of wild animals, buffaloes, bulls, he-goats, ichneumons, wild boars, rhinoceros, antelopes, iguanas, reindeer, lions, tigers. Human sacrifice is of more avail than anything else. Blood drawn from one's own body may also be offered. Ordinarily females of all animals are exempted from sacrifice. But when mass sacrifices are offered, the distinction between the male

and the female is not observed. Horses and elephants are not accepted by the goddess. They are meant for special sacrifices by kings. The *Yoginī Tantra* enlarges the list and includes also monkeys amongst sacrificial animals. In worshipping the goddess on the cremation ground buffaloes only should be sacrificed (*Y.T.* 2/9/158 ; 2/7/170). Spirituous liquor is a constant accompaniment to blood offering (2/8/17).

This list seems to be made up of the various animals sacrificed by diverse tribal groups. Amongst the Singphos, Lushais and the Gāros dogs are sacrificed on various occasions. Amongst the Gāros dogs are sacrificed at the time of cremation, the idea being that the spirit of the deceased would lose its way and never reach Chikmang were it left to find the road unaided (Hunter : *Statistical Account of Assam,* 1879 ; Vol. II p. 154). Now dogs came also into reference in the menu of Hindu offerings to the manes of the dead. In a place called Aśvatīrtha, offerings to the spirit of the dead could be made. The offerings might consist of pure vegetables or flesh. The flesh of all animals could be offered excepting that of bulls and dogs, which was prohibited in the Kali era (*Y.T.* 2/5/156). Thus dogs also were accepted on principle but rejected owing to the exigencies of the Kali age !

Chapter V

VIṢṆU WORSHIP

62. Viṣṇu-worship does not seem to occupy any prominence in the accounts of the *Kālikā Purāṇa.* Except in the case of Vāsudeva Viṣṇu very little is added to the bare mention of the *Pīthas.* Only *five* manifestations are taken notice of with names of the places where they were worshipped :

(a) Viṣṇu as Haya-Grīva killed Jvarāsura (*K.P.* 81/75) in a place called Maṇikūṭa.

(b) Viṣṇu as Fish Incarnation worshipped in the Matsyadhvaja mountain east of Maṇikūṭa (*K.P.* 82/50).

(c) Mādhava in the form of a Bhairava named Pāṇḍunātha in Rakṣakūṭa (*K.P.* 82/65).

(d) Viṣṇu as Boar Incarnation in the Citravaha mountain east of Pāṇḍu (*K.P.* 82/74).

(e) Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu in the Dikkaravāsinī region (*K.P.* 83/90-).

Of these the most important are the *Pīthas* of Haya-Grīva and Vāsudeva. Haya-Grīva's is a living temple even now attracting hundreds of pilgrims. But it has received scant notice in the *Kālikā Purāṇa.* There are detailed descriptions of the mode of worship of Vāsudeva. But it has lost its former importance.

63. The legend about Haya-Grīva is that Viṣṇu in the form of Haya-Grīva killed the Fever-Demon (*Jvarāsura*) in the Maṇikūṭa hill and lived there for the benefit of men, gods and *asuras.* Afflicted with fever

and killing the Fever Demon, Viṣṇu took a recovery bath and a tank was formed in the place. It was called Apunarbhava because whosoever bathed there suffered no second birth. There is another reference to the killing of a demon named Haya-Grīva. Near about Viśvanātha, the Lord of the world (*Jagatpatiḥ*) fought with Haya-Grīva and after having killed him migrated to Maṇikūṭa. It is not clear whether the Lord of the world refers to Viṣṇu or Śiva. The context seems to point to Śiva as the killer of Haya-Grīva (K.P. 81/75-; 83/24).

It has not been stated clearly who this Haya-Grīva demon was. In the Naraka legend there is mention of one Haya-Grīva. He was the keeper of the eastern gate of Naraka's city. He was killed by Kṛṣṇa who invaded Naraka's kingdom (*K.P.* 41/86).

Amongst earlier legends about Haya-Grīva the following are most noteworthy. In the *Mahābhārata* (*Śāntiparva*: Chap. 347), Viṣṇu assumed the form of Haya-Grīva and killed the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha. In the *Devī-Bhāgavata* (1/5), Viṣṇu in the form of Haya-Grīva killed a demon of the same name. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (6/6/30), Viṣṇu in the form of a fish killed the demon Haya-Grīva who had stolen the Vedas. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* recognises a certain Haya-Śiras as an incarnation of Viṣṇu (2/7/11).

It is difficult to say on what occasion Viṣṇu came to ancient Kāmarūpa and killed Haya-Grīva and the Fever-Demon unless it be in connection with the killing of Naraka. There seems to be also some reference to the *Bhāgavata* story in as much as there is also a temple to the Fish incarnation of Viṣṇu near about the Haya-Grīva temple.

64. The *Yoginī Tantra* gives an entirely different account about the origin of the Viṣṇu image in the Maṇikūṭa. It attempts to link the Haya-Grīva image with that of Jagannātha in Puri (Orissa). King Indradyumna of Orissa dreamt at night that a big nameless tree would come floating by the sea-shore. He was to take an axe and cut it into seven pieces in the morning. He did so and of the seven pieces, two were brought over to Kāmarūpa. With one piece the Haya-Grīva image was made and with the other the Fish-god named Mādhava (*Y.T.* 2/9/244-3). This seems to be an attempt at Vaiṣṇavising the god who seems to be of different origin. Haya-Grīva is not a sufficiently famous god in the Hindu pantheon to merit worship and a temple. But he occupies high reputation in the Buddhist *Tantras* and in the Buddhist pantheon. The *Tantric* origin seems to be hinted also by the fact that the god can be worshipped not only with vegetarian offerings but also with fish and animal food (*Y.T.* 2/9/143-). Another noteworthy fact is that the Bhuṭiyās (Buddhists of the neighbouring Bhoṭan hills) come down from the hills in the cold season and worship the god.

65. The Vāsudeva Pītha stands on a different footing. It is worshipped with purely vegetarian offerings and represents an earlier form of Vaiṣṇavism than the neo-Vaiṣṇavism of mediaeval times and goes back to the *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās*. In the text the *Nārada Pāñcarātra* is quoted as the authority (*K.P.* 83/141). Something however need be said about the *Saṁhitā* form of early Vaiṣṇavism.

"The *Saṁhitās* are historically noteworthy in two ways. They mark the first emergence of Śākta principles in the Vaiṣṇavite sect. But they are also notable

as being the first manuals formed to express both the beliefs and practice of the Vaiṣṇavas. In the matter of practice they are, as it were, the Kalpasūtras of the Vaiṣṇavas..... The theology of the chief Saṁhitās is essentially a development of the teaching of the Nārāyaṇīya episode of the epic with the addition of a considerable Śākta element .... The doctrines of *mantra* and *yantra* in the *Saṁhitās* are indistinguishable from the Śākta teaching. Magic in all its forms, with innumerable spells and rites and talismans is carefully described and eagerly commended. The great sectarian mantras, *Oṁ namo Bhagavate Vāsudevāya* and *Oṁ namo Nārāyaṇāya* are expounded and studied with care" (J. N. Farquhar: *Outlines of the Religious literature of India*, 1920; pp. 183-86). Further, "the Gopāla Kṛṣṇa element does not form a part of the systems that are based upon the old *Pāñcarātra* doctrines. The *Ekāntika dharma* or monotheistic religion was that which was promulgated by the *Bhagavadgītā*, but the *Pāñcarātra* system consisting as it does of the worship of Vāsudeva and his several forms, shews no organic connection with that work, though *bhakti* or devotion is common to both" (R. G. Bhandarkar: *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor religious systems*: 1913; p. 39).

The mode of worship of Vāsudeva as propounded in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* corresponds to the above analysis. The germ-mantra of Vāsudeva consists of twelve syllables *Oṁ namo Bhagavate Vāsudevāya.* Along with him a pentad of complementary deities are to be worshipped: Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Brahmā, Śambhu and Gaurī. The two latter are never to be separated in worship. There are eight attendants (Yogīs) to Vāsudeva: Balabhadra, Kāma, Aniruddha, Nārāyaṇa, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Narasiṁha and Varāha. The leading god (Nāyaka) is Vāsudeva and the leading goddess is Vimalā. The attending females (Yoginīs) to Balabhadra and others are certain abstractions: Utkarṣiṇī, Jñeyā, Jñānā, Kriyā, Yogā, Prahvī, Aiśānī and Anugrāhī. The worship is to be performed with flowers and vegetarian offerings. There are different syllabic *mantras* also for the worship of the weapons and ornaments like the mace, the lotus etc. (*K.P.* 83/90).

That there was a colony of Vaiṣṇavite settlers in the north-east frontier is shewn by the fact that the ancestors of Gopāla Ātā whose mother migrated from the Kalitā kingdom bore Vaiṣṇavite names, Vāsudeva, Harideva, Sankarṣaṇa, Kāmadeva etc. (§ 51).

THE BREAK WITH THE MOTHER

66. In the Vaiṣṇavism of Vāsudeva worship the shadow of the Mother was there in the adoration of the pentad of which the Mother was a constituent member. There was also the *nāyikā* (the female complement) to Vāsudeva and the attendant Yoginīs. But the monotheistic Vaiṣṇavism of the sixteenth century marks a complete breaking away from the influence of the Mother or other gods. Moreover if the Vaiṣṇavism of the Vāsudeva cult is derived from the Pāñcarātra system which refuses recognition to the Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa element, the neo-Vaiṣṇavism of the later age is based on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which idolises it, so that one of its formulas is "I take refuge in the feet of Kṛṣṇa, the Gopāla, the Govinda, the scion of the Yadu race" Yet Rādhā is not acknowledged nor any female complement.

This neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Assam presents certain features that have strong points of resemblance with

some aspects of Southern Vaiṣṇavism. They are considered together in the course of the discussion.

67. The founder of Assam Vaiṣṇavism was Śankara Deva, a Kāyastha by caste. He was born in 1449 A.D. in the district of Nowgong, Assam. His ancestors were all Śāktas. He was thoroughly educated in mediaeval Sanskrit lore and he settled down as a house-holder. But after the death of his wife he went out on a long pilgrimage of twelve years and visited almost all the sacred places of Northern India. After having returned from pilgrimage he propagated his new cult of Vaiṣṇavism.

The official name of Śankara Deva's Vaiṣṇavism is *Ekaśaraṇa dharma*,—the religion of Supreme surrender to One; and that One is *Viṣṇu* who in the form of Nārāyaṇa assumes incarnations from age to age. The most favourite incarnation in which Viṣṇu is to be worshipped is that of Kṛṣṇa.

The surrender to One is very rigorously enjoined. For an Ekaśaraṇīyā, the worship of other gods and goddesses is strictly prohibited. It has been said by Śankara himself that "a Vaiṣṇavite should not worship any other god except Viṣṇu, he should not enter into any other god's temple, nor should he partake of the offering made to any other god. In so doing *bhakti* would be vitiated." Another writer says that a *bhakta* should have to undergo *cāndrāyaṇa* penance if he partakes of the offering made to any other god. There is similar insistence on the worship of One God in Southern-Vaiṣṇavism also; "Vaiṣṇavism interdicted its votaries from the worship of any deities except the highest known to it, who was the God *Nārāyaṇa* of the *Upaniṣads*, the primal cause of all things" (T. Rajagopala Chariar; *The Vaiṣṇavite Reformers of India*, 1909, p. 18)

68. In Southern Vaiṣṇavism, there appears to be some sort of hostility towards the worship of other gods; neither does their importance seem to be at all recognised. It is said that when Kurathalvar, a disciple of Rāmānuja was forced by the Śaiva Cola king to acknowledge the supremacy of God Śiva by uttering *Śivāt parataraṁ nahi*,—(there is none beyond Śiva), the Vaiṣṇavite sarcastically replied, *droṇamasti tataḥ param* (there is *droṇa* beyond Śiva), Śiva and *droṇa* being two measures of quantity and *droṇa* measuring a larger quantity than Śiva. In Assamese Vaiṣṇavism synthesis between the worshipping of Viṣṇu and the propitiation of other gods is differently established. Bhaṭṭadeva, a Brāhmin *Ekaśaraṇīyā*, has enjoined that a Brahmin should not make the customary offering to the five gods (*pañca-yajña*) at the time of his meal as prescribed by the *smṛtis*. An offering like that would spoil his *Ekaśaraṇa bhakti* to Viṣṇu. He should instead make an offering to Viṣṇu and that will satisfy all other gods. For, has it not been said in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, that if water is poured at the foot of a tree, then all the branches and leaves of the tree suck up nourishment? Another Brāhmin *Ekaśaranīyā*, Vanamālī Deva, when casually confronted with the phallic image of god Śiva saluted it by uttering the mantra, *namo Lakṣmīpati Bhagavanta*, (salute to Thee, God, Lord of Lakṣmī). All other gods and goddesses were mere manifestations of Viṣṇu and the recognition of their status as independent divinities was uncalled for.

The central texts of Assam Vaiṣṇavism are the *Gitā* and the *Bhāgavata* which have been rendered into verse and prose by Śankara Deva himself and his followers. The process of initiation is called *śaraṇa* and not *dīkṣā* and the *mantra* is called *nāma*. The word *śaraṇa* occurs

very prominently in the three Sanskrit prose pamphlets of Rāmānuja which he calls *Śaraṇāgati*. A formula of four names is given at the time of initiation, *Rāma-Kṛṣṇa-Nārāyaṇa-Hari*. The mode of prayer is constant recitation of the names through the mouth and contemplation of the image of the Lord in the heart. And though the most favourite deity is Kṛṣṇa, and his deeds are the topics of discussion, the image of meditation (*dhyāna rūpa*) prescribed is that of Nārāyaṇa who dwells in Vaikuṇṭha and whose feet are worshipped by Mother Lakṣmī. Śankara Deva's description of the vision of Nārāyana in Vaikuṇṭha seems to be a verse paraphrase of Rāmānuja's Vaikuṇṭha vision in his *Vaikuṇṭha gadya*. In Rāmānuja's system "the most prominent name is Nārāyaṇa, though Vāsudeva takes his proper place when the supreme soul and the *Vyūhas* are spoken of" (Bhandarkar: p. 57). In Śankara Deva's system, Nārāyaṇa is the "self-conscious pure form of Hari" (*Caitanyamaya-Śuddharūpa-Hari*) and the primal cause of all incarnations (*Sarva avatārara kāraṇa Nārāyaṇa*). The formula of four names of Śankara seems to be a blend of Rāmānuja's *Nārāyaṇa* and Viṣṇusvāmī's formula of three names, *Rāma-Kṛṣṇa-Hari* (Farquhar, p. 238).

69. Śankara Deva was a house-holder. He married a second time after his return from the first pilgrimage. He did not countenance celibacy in his followers for the purpose of devotion to Viṣṇu. But his apostolic successor Mādhava Deva was a celibate and he created an order of celibate monks called Kevalīyās, who live in small huts within the precincts of religious temples called *Satras*. The word Kevalīyā does not seem to designate the Vaiṣṇavite monks of any other system in Northern India who are called by different names. Rāmānuja in

recognition of this class of Bhaktas "who desire final deliverance and seek the consciousness of their pure soul" uses the word *kevalin* (Bhandarkar: p. 54).

In the close insistence on the *dāsya* mode of worship, the *Ekaśaraṇa* Vaiṣṇavism of Assam seems to be at one with the southern system. Rāmānuja rapturously refers in his *Vaikuṇṭha gadya* to the *nityasvāmya* of the Lord, and the *nityadāsya* of himself. Śankara Deva in all his writings invariably refers to himself as the servant of Kṛṣṇa (*Kṛṣṇara kiṁkara*). The *dāsya* relationship between the devotee and God has been so enthusiastically extolled that in a small poem written in Assamese by an immediate Brāhmin follower of Śankara Deva, Rādhā the unmarried consort of Kṛṣṇa and symbolising the *madhura* relationship with God in so many systems of Northern Vaiṣṇavism, is represented as an ascetic constantly reciting the name of Kṛṣṇa, her body reduced to a skeleton and covered all over with dust—like Vālmīki uttering the name of Rāma buried in an ant-hill! This is quite a novel picture of Rādhā constructed to fit in with the mode of worship stressed in the *Ekaśaraṇa* system. This poem may also be looked upon as symbolising a protest against the varied Rādhā cults that prevailed in different parts of contemporary India.

Idol-worship does not occupy any prominence in the *Ekaśaraṇa* system. In performing all official religious ceremonies, a sacred book (esp. the *Bhāgavata* in Śankara's translation) is placed on a pedestalled tray, and offerings and homage are paid to it as to the Lord. Even in the principal Vaiṣṇavite shrines, a sacred book is always placed on the Lord's throne. The adoration of the sacred book is a feature, amongst all the various religious sects of India, only of the Śikhs. In the absence

of any other point of correspondence between Assam Vaiṣṇavism and Śikhism, it does not appear that this custom should have been borrowed from the Śikhs. The present writer has no information whether the worship of sacred books characterises any school of Southern Vaiṣṇavism. But Rāmānuja's commentary on the Vedanta Sūtra, *Śāstrayonitvāt* (V.S.II. 3), which has been summarised as *Śāstra pramāṇa sambodhyaṁ Brahma*,—"the Brahman can be understood only through the Scripture," may, in some way, be looked upon as influencing the deification of sacred books.

70. Śankara Deva was a Kāyastha (a Śudra), but he counted some of the most prominent Brāhmin scholars of his time amongst his immediate disciples. To the first batch of Brāhmin followers he gave the *nāma-mantra* himself. They bowed to the sacred book placed on a tray. Later on when a good number was converted, he entrusted the task of giving *mantra* to the Brāhmins to his family priest Rām-Rām-Guru. Śankara's practice was hotly challenged by hostile Brāhmin Paṇḍits. How could a Śudra give *mantra* to Brāhmins? But the reply of Śankara and his Brāhmin associates was that a Śudra was debarred from giving Vedic *mantras* only to Brāhmins. There was no injunction against a Śudra giving *nāma-mantra* to any person. According to the *Varṇāśrama dharma*, each social order had its own allotted duties but in reciting and communicating the name of the Lord, there were no scriptural injunctions curbing any order's liberty. In other respects the status of the Brāhmins as custodians of the sacred lore and as entitled to perform religious rites and ceremonies was liberally recognised, nor were the Brāhmins as a class anywhere denounced in his writings and teachings. He, however,

like Manavala Mahamuni of the South (Rajagopala Chariar: p. 105), rejected caste superiority as a ground of respect among men otherwise equally venerable "as lovers of God". "Why need one be a Brahmin", says Śankara, "who devoutly recites the name of Kṛṣṇa? He might be a *cāṇḍāla*, but he is far superior to any man who is not attached to the name of Hari". Rāmānuja's offer to partake of the leavings of Kāñchīpurna, a Śudra's meal, does not shew that he had any great regard for the sanctity of caste as such.

While in certain schools of Northern Vaiṣṇavism the free congregational mixing of men and women devotees has been regarded as a fruitful source of religious abuses, the position of women in Assam and Southern Vaiṣṇavism stands as unique. It has been said of Rāmānuja that "women were never permitted to mix with men in devotion or abandon their usual household duties much less to assume the character of nuns" (Rajagopala Chariar: p. 113). In the *Ekaśaraṇa* system there are *Kevalīyā* monks but there are no nuns. In the religious gatherings of men, women are not allowed. They carry on their devotional chantings in the courtyards of the temples in a separate group, and that too not simultaneously. It has even been said that Śankara never gave any *nāma mantra* to women. But this point has now been slightly relaxed.

71. There are a few other points of minor resemblance which, considered by themselves, seem to be merely fortuitous and yet which, viewed in the light of the the contexts of the previous sections, may seem to be significant. Śankara Deva even during his life time was venerated as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, yet *guru-worship* in the form in which it prevails in certain

systems of Northern Vaiṣṇavism is remarkably absent from the Assamese system. Alone amongst all the founders of religious sects in India, Śankara enjoyed the unique honorific title of *Mahāpuruṣa* even amongst his contemporaries. Hence the popular name of Śankara's Vaiṣṇavism is *Mahāpuruṣīyā*. Different saints of India had different honorific titles. Caitanya was called Mahāprabhu, the saints of Śikhism were called Gurus, Tulsīdāsa was called Gosvāmī and so on. *Mahāpuruṣa* is not a very popular word to be used in an honorific sense. It is said that Yamunacharyya of Southern India composed a work named *Mahāpuruṣa Nirṇaya*, now lost. Might this designation also like *Kevalīyā* come from the South ? Saint Satagopa of the South is the author of a *Thousand* Tamil songs. Mādhava Deva, the apostolic successor of Śankara Deva, at Śankara's bidding composed a religious poem called *Hāzāri Ghoṣā*, the book of of a *Thousand Ghoṣās* or stanzas. Rāmānuja lived up to 120 years. There are two views about the age of Śankara Deva. According to one view, he lived 105 years, according to another he lived 120 years.

72. Śankara had numerous biographers. Amongst them two are Brāhmins. But the most curious fact is the total silence on the part of all the biographers about who the *guru* of Śankara was, or wherefrom he derived his system. Śankara Deva also in his voluminous writings has no where made any reference to the source of his illumination. But one of his biographers, Rāmānanda Dvija represents Śankara as saying to one of his followers that after he had visited the temple of Jagannātha at Puri, he resolved not to bow that head of his down before any other god which was once bowed before the image of Jagannātha. This may lead on to the supposition that Puri was the scene of Śankara's illumination. Centuries ago Rāmānuja had visited Puri and established a *mutt* at a place called Kūrmasthāna. Puri is the great cosmopolitan centre of various Vaiṣṇavite sects. It may be surmised that during his sojourn at Puri in his long pilgrimage, he came deeply under the influence of some teacher of Southern Vaiṣṇavism and received the fundamental ideas of the Southern system which he later developed in the light of other Vaiṣṇavite texts. The *prapatti* of the South corresponds to *Śaraṇa* in Assam.

Amongst neo-Vaiṣṇavite reformers Vallabha acknowledged no human teacher but said he learnt his system direct from Kṛṣṇa (Farquhar, p. 313). Śankara seems to make no such claim himself. But one Brāhmin biographer of his finds in his coming fulfilment of the prophecy of the *Kālikā Purāṇa* about the future advent of Viṣṇu in person (§ 17) and claims that this time Kṛṣṇa himself has come down in the person of Śankara to this Mleccha kingdom of Kāmarūpa and prohibiting the worship of other gods and goddesses proclaimed the glory of the Lord's name (Dvija Rāmānanda).

THE NEW DISCIPLINE

73. Since the beginning of the thirteenth century the ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa was slowly undergoing a process of disintegration. After the fall of the last Hindu kings of the Pāla dynasty, a class of local potentates called the Bāra-Bhūyās were keeping watch over the broken fragments of the ancient Hindu kingdom like so many wardens of the marches without any overlord. But even their vigils were challenged by the entry of the Ahoms, the rise of the Kāchāris in the east and

of the Koches in the west. The existence of society was threatened. Moreover society itself was moth-eaten from within and without any sustaining vitality from any external source. The land was infested with itinerant teachers of the Vāmācāra Tantric schools with their insistence on the philosophy of sex and palate. Amongst religious rites the most spectacular were bloody sacrifices to gods and goddesses amidst deafening noises of drums and cymbals, night vigils on virgin worship and the lewd dances of temple-women.

To renounce the world for one's religion is said to be easier than to live for it in the world. Śankara Deva chose the difficult path of living up to his faith in the world, and what is still more difficult, to persuade the world to live up to it. To the exhausted kingdom without inner vitality and external cohesion, he threw out a gospel of absolute surrender to One, the *Eka-Śaraṇa* religion. It was a difficult religion for contemporary Assam where every woman was looked upon as a miniature incarnation of the Devī and every hill-top as a petrified god or a goddess. It is often misunderstood even now.

74. The *Eka-Śaraṇa* system is not a religion of bargain and barter between God and men or of sacrifice and easy recompense ; it is one with exclusive emphasis on slow spiritual regeneration, on growth of a new spiritual outlook by laying flesh and spirit in the hands of the Lord. Life once surrendered, given over to the Lord, can no longer be lived according to the desires and impulses inherited from old Adam. They are to be governed by higher laws and purer manners. In the story of a Benares saint of recent times who of his own accord would not call in a surgeon when he was suffering

from a carbuncle, because his body and mind were already given over to the Lord and the Lord would take care of them for all they were worth, we get a new glimpse of the outlook implied by the doctrine of *Eka-Śaraṇa*. Śankara Deva himself once drove out a follower (Vyāsa Kalāi) from his fold, because he secretly offered worship to the goddess of small-pox when his son was ill. Mādhava Deva also cast into the water from his boat a favourite disciple when the sky was overcast and the disciple called upon the god of rains to disperse the clouds. All this sounds harsh and fanatical. But the new life is a life sold out to God in absolute faith and devotion and it requires supreme courage and sacrifice to live it in the new context of ideas. Interference with divine intention is revocation and absence of faith.

This was the programme of new life he placed before his fellow beings. It was a difficult ideal but it had its own appeal. Once devoutly begun it unfolded its inherent sweetness and light which became its own allurement.

75. It was not a secret doctrine whispered from ear to ear. It was proclaimed in places of public congregation, it was proclaimed in places of public amusement, it was echoed when people in the course of the day's business relieved their hearts in songs. The clash of arms of the contending chiefs lost its terror and the nocturnal revelries their temptations for the followers of the new faith.

A new gospel requires a new bible. And Śankara Deva gave his gospel in songs, dramas, stories and devotional exhortations. He inspired his followers and associates to popularise the literature of devotion. He led the way in acting in dramatic performances and sing-

ing in devotional congregations. He was in the full blaze of the day in all his activities, the mystic haze belonging only to the life of his spirit.

It has been said by a modern prophet that perfect equipoise of body and mind is absolutely necessary to receive the impact of the divine. It is easier to develop religious consciousness than to retain it. Some people go mad, saints and prophets often break into frenzies or fall into hysteric trances. There is the story of a saint who in a religious frenzy induced by the sound of *khols* and *kartāls* threw himself into the sea in a moon-lit night and so ended his life. The self-command in sustaining the shock of the descent of the divine is symbolised by the story of Śiva and the descent of the Ganges upon his head. Amongst all the gods, Śiva the *Yogī* only could retain within his matted locks the full fury of the descending river without being swept over by the current. Śankara Deva's voluminous biographies contain details of minute incidents of his life, but there is no hint of any occasion when he lost his mental balance or sanity. He kept himself wide awake whether singing, acting or reciting; he was perfectly self-conscious in the midst of polemics with his religious opponents. Yet he had a keen sense of humour. He saw life steadily and saw it whole.

76. Literature was not the only expression of this new life. Regional *Satras* (monasteries) were established as the centres of new consciousness and the allegiance of the mind and soul was given to them. These regional institutions framed moral laws and controlled the activities of society. As miniature replicas of the *Satras*, village *Nāmghars* were built and the *Nāmghars* combined the functions of a village parliament, a village court, a village school and a village church. These institutions served as sheet anchors to Assamese society in the midst of continually shifting political circumstances. They often shook to their very foundations under the blast of the rulers' fury, but stood erect again when the fury was spent. But whether in the sunshine or under the clouds, they were regarded as the vital centres of life and worthy of the gift of all that was prized and loved best. Unto Caesar was given only what belonged to Caesar! And so a state was built within a state!

77. Thus Śankara Deva has given Assam a new life, letters and a state. Rulers have come and gone and their kingdoms perished in the dust, but Śankara's state endures "and broad in the general hearts of men his power survives."

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